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## ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, A DOCUMENT ANALYSIS OF THE PRESENCE AND RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SCHWAB'S FOUR COMMONPLACES IN A LITERACY CURRICULUM THAT'S ADOPTED IN HIGH-NEEDS SCHOOLS, by CLETIS GERALDINE KENYA ALLEN, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Education, in the College of Education & Human Development, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chairperson, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

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**A DOCUMENT ANALYSIS OF THE PRESENCE AND RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN  
SCHWAB'S FOUR COMMONPLACES IN A LITERACY CURRICULUM THAT'S  
ADOPTED IN HIGH-NEEDS SCHOOLS**

by

**CLETIS GERALDINE KENYA ALLEN**

Under the Direction of Dr. Diane Truscott

**ABSTRACT**

The adoption of a literacy curriculum with an “evidence-based” label in high-needs elementary schools may influence the inclusion of elementary teachers in curricular choices and instructional decision-making. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the presence and relationships between Joseph Schwab’s Four Commonplaces (1973), which argues for an intersect among the subject matter, teacher, learner, and context, and opportunities to incorporate instructional practices using Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction. The study was guided by the two research questions:

1. What is the function of the literacy elements, teacher, learner and learning context in a literacy curriculum?
2. What relationships exist between the literacy elements, teacher, learner, and learning context in the literacy curriculum?

A case study design was employed to focus on the presence of literacy elements, the teacher, the learner, and the learning context in one literacy curriculum that was recommended for adoption by the state department of education. Documents representing the corpus for analysis, including descriptions and sample units from the publisher's website, teacher interviews by the publisher and the state ELA instructional framework, totaled 20 documents categorized as main versus additional sources. Document analysis using selective coding methods for federal, state, and curriculum documents and videos found an emphasis of six areas of literacy, whole group instruction and small group instruction as the context for learning, teachers as the implementers of explicit and systematic lessons, and the importance of learners to access and apply literacy skills. Findings show the relationship between commonplaces reveal the influence of the subject matter and the learning context on teacher-learner interactions. The findings reveal that the curriculum did not present opportunities for CRLI implementation. The study has implications for consideration on critically thinking about the "evidence-based" label, consideration for curriculum adoption, teacher instructional decision-making, and argues for the implementation of teacher practices in Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction in high-needs schools.

INDEX WORDS: literacy, instruction, curriculum, "evidenced-based", high-needs school, Joseph Schwab's Four Commonplaces, Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction

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A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Education

in

Curriculum and Instruction

in

The Department of Early Childhood and Elementary Education

in

the College of Education & Human Development

Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA

2021



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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to my elders who fueled my potential and spoke to my greatness:

Mrs. Donna Mims-Lach

Mr. Paul Lach

Pastor & Mother Arrington

Pastor John Arrington

Papa Edward Smith

Grandma Betty Smith

Dr. Susan Crim-McClendon

Although you have transitioned from elders to ancestors, your words are engraved in my spirit and illuminated in my journey. Continue to rest.

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## **1 THE PROBLEM**

The U.S. Department of Education reauthorized Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 to provide state departments with more authority and flexibility in developing a plan to support education in their schools (Georgia Department of Education, 2019). ESSA decreased authority of the Secretary of Education and the U.S. Department of Education while releasing states from waiver agreements under No Child Left Behind legislation. ESSA outlined a Literacy Education for All plan for states to improve student achievement in reading and writing through the implementation of high-quality instruction and effective teaching strategies. States received federal funding by creating, revising, or updating current comprehensive literacy instructional plans. States also provided funding to districts, particularly high-needs communities, that implemented literacy curricula that is determined to be evidence-based by publishing companies to provide high-quality comprehensive literacy instruction for students in high-needs schools. Since the 2015 reauthorization of ESSA, urban districts continued to adopt literacy curricula that is determined to be evidence-based, as recommended by the State Department of Education, to increase reading achievement for their students based on reports that explained how it is a solution for improving low reading test scores in high-needs schools (Irvine & Larson, 2007). However, the examination of the presence and relationships of the subject matter, teacher, learner, and learning context was needed to understand the implications of adopting a literacy curriculum that is labeled as “evidence-based” (Schwab, 1973). This research study examined the inclusion of the six areas of literacy, the teacher, the learner, and the learning context that is adopted and implemented in high-needs elementary schools.



Evidence-based curriculum is designed to facilitate content knowledge and skills that align with grade-level standards (The Wing Institute, 2021). The process of adopting an evidence-based curriculum should include the following criteria: alignment with grade-level standards, defined levels of competency, explicit descriptions of increasing levels of difficulty in scope and sequence, the requirement of mastery-based instruction, the inclusion for opportunities to implement formative assessments and provide content-specific feedback, and the availability of scientifically based reading research. No Child Left Behind legislation defined Scientifically Based Reading Research (SBRR) as research that “applies rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain valid knowledge relevant to reading development, reading instruction, and reading difficulties” (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 126). Table 1 below describes four criteria used to determine if a literacy curriculum is support by SBRR.

**Table 1**

*No Child Left Behind’s Criteria for Scientifically Based Reading Research*

1	Employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment
2	Involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn
3	Relies on measurements or observational methods that provide valid data across evaluators and observers and across multiple measurements and observations
4	Has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective, and scientific review

*Note.* The four criteria for Scientifically Based Reading Research (SBRR) are on page 127 of the No Child Left Behind Act.

The proponents for SBRR preferred experimental and quasi-experimental methods on reading instruction (Powell, Cantrell, & Correll, 2017), in which, favored quantitative studies more than qualitative studies using other research methods (Christie, 2008). Government educational agencies, such as What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), were created to review and rate the effectiveness of literacy curricula and instructional practices based on “high-quality” scientific research (What Works Clearinghouse, 2019). The preference for literacy curricula that is supported by SBRR limits the range and scope of research that shows evidence of effective reading strategies that increase low reading achievement across high-needs schools.

Under current ESSA legislation, states create a Comprehensive Literacy Instruction plan to provide high-quality instruction and effective strategies to improve literacy achievement in high-needs elementary schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). ESSA defines Comprehensive Literacy Instruction (CLI) as developmentally and age-appropriate, contextually explicit, systematic, and intentional instruction across six areas of literacy: phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing. Furthermore, CLI is designed to help students develop phonemic awareness, vocabulary, reading comprehension, reading fluency, and writing across all content areas (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Literacy instruction connects with each state’s grade-level literacy standards so learners can “navigate, understand, and write about, complex print and digital subject matter” (p. 136). CLI describes four aims associated with literacy instruction. First, CLI incorporates a variety of instructional approaches, including individual discussion and small group discussion, to increase students’ motivation to read and write and strengthen language and vocabulary skills. Secondly, CLI values diverse, high quality print materials that reflect the students’ reading and development levels and interests. Thirdly, CLI gives students frequent practice and application of reading and writing

strategies. Lastly, CLI uses a variety of assessments (i.e., screening, diagnostic, formative, and summative) to gather information about a student's learning needs and to inform instruction.

States, under ESSA, develop a plan that incorporates the aims of CLI along with the inclusion of grade-level literacy standards, targeted and improvement activities, and valid and reliable assessments to show evidence of improving literacy achievement in high-needs schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Despite the research explaining no improvement with literacy achievement in high-needs schools (Beecher & Sweeny, 2008; Chatterji, 2006; Palumbo & Kramer-Vida, 2012), district and school leaders continue to adopt literacy curriculum that is described as evidence-based by publishing companies to receive federal funding for improving reading test scores and providing professional learning for teachers identified as having minimal skills in teaching literacy (Irvine & Larson, 2007; Powell, Cantrell, & Correll, 2017). Kirkland (2014) asserts that supporters of literacy curricula that is described as evidence-based have devoted time, energy, and resources to developing the linguistic and cognitive elements of literacy needed for skill mastery. Literacy skills are taught as isolated and transferrable skills used for other social and academic contexts without the consideration of the cultural, social, and historical practices of literacy from culturally diverse and historically marginalized groups (Kirkland, 2014). With the focus on teaching state literacy standards, the adoption of a literacy curriculum that is described as evidenced-based has affected the dynamics of teaching and learning literacy in high-needs elementary schools (Dresser, 2012).

### **Significance of Study**

This research study valued the importance of examining the comprehensiveness of a literacy curriculum with an “evidence-based” label for school adoption and teacher implementation

in high-need schools. Many decisions about curriculum adoption were made by school, district, state, and federal leaders where teachers were afforded fewer limited opportunities to participate in discussions on curriculum adoption and implementation. Yet, teachers were the stakeholders who teach, adjust, and respond to curriculum implementation challenges inside and outside their classrooms. Literacy in high-needs communities encompassed “the interactions among spaces and purposes, individuals and tools” (Kirkland, 2014, p. 396). This research study included the roles of and interactions between the literacy elements, the teacher, the learner, and the learning context of one literacy curriculum that is labeled as “evidence-based” by the publishing company. This research study described the opportunities for the inclusion of culture, students’ voices and experiences, and instructional strategies to support literacy learning for culturally diverse learners. This research study added to current literature which describes the implications of curriculum adoption and implementation in high-needs schools (Ainsworth et al., 2012; Kavanagh & Fisher-Ari, 2017; Parhar & Sensory, 2011; Powell, Cantrell, & Correll, 2017). Moreover, the results of this study could offer direction for school, district, state, and federal leaders to consider curriculum adoption, curriculum implementation, and instructional strategies that support meaningful literacy opportunities for culturally diverse learners in high-needs schools.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the presence and relationships between the literacy elements, teacher, learner, and learning context within a literacy curriculum as defined by Joseph Schwab’s (1973) *Four Commonplaces of Curriculum Development* and opportunities to incorporate strategies using Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction. The research questions were:

1. What is the function of the literacy elements, teacher, learner and learning context in a literacy curriculum?

2. What relationships exist between the literacy elements, teacher, learner, and learning context in the literacy curriculum?

The study was bound to how one literacy curriculum is conceptualized, and defined, in relation to its inclusiveness of the subject matter, teacher, learner, and learning context. The next section explained three definitions that were important to this research study: literacy curriculum, comprehensiveness, and high-needs schools.

### **Definitions**

The phrase “evidence-based” is a descriptor word used by publishing companies to label literacy curricula that is supported with scientifically based reading research (Christie, 2008; Kavanagh & Fisher-Ari, 2018). This label encompasses other descriptor phrases, such as “research-based” (Powell, Cantrell, & Correll, 2017) and “scientifically-valid research” (Teale, Whittington, & Hoffman, 2018), to describe the effectiveness of a literacy curriculum to improve literacy achievement.

Glatthorn (1999) describes eight types of curriculum: hidden curriculum, excluded curriculum, recommended curriculum, written curriculum, supported curriculum, tested curriculum, taught curriculum, and learned curriculum.

Glatthorn (1999) explains that the different types of curriculum interact with one another in various ways. The hidden curriculum, or unintended practices, has a strong influence over students due to the constant exposure to messages about the learning, themselves, and their communities. The tested curriculum, which includes standardized tests, district benchmarks, and teacher-made assessments, has the greatest influence on both teachers and students within the current era of accountability. Glatthorn explains that a large gap between the taught and learned curriculum occurs when teachers have limited opportunities to provide meaningful and relevant

lessons which affect students' motivation and the application of content-specific skills during instructional time. Glatthorn notes that the supported curriculum (e.g., available educational resources) has a strong influence on the taught curriculum because the teachers' manuals, textbooks, and literacy and informational texts included with the literacy curriculum become the main source of content knowledge. Additionally, publishing companies align curricula and programs with the tested curriculum that is created by test companies.

In this study, a *literacy curriculum* is recognized as a literacy curriculum that argues it meets the requirements as an evidence-based curriculum and created by a major educational publishing company for use and implementation by teachers to guide and support literacy learning in their classrooms.

*Comprehensive* is defined as the holistic view of a learning environment (Pyle & Luce-Kapler, 2014). This term was used in this research study to describe the holistic quality of a literacy curriculum as defined by Joseph Schwab's Four Commonplaces. The holistic qualities that were studied were the six literacy elements, learner, teacher, and learning context.

ESSA defines a *high-needs school* as a public school situated in an area where 30 percent or more of students come from families with incomes below the poverty line (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). This term is used in this research study to describe elementary schools that serve learners in low-income, high-transient, and culturally diverse communities.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks**

A paradigm is a set of assumptions about the world that guide thinking and research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Specifically, Ponterotto (2005) states that a research paradigm sets the context for a study. I situated this research study in the interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivists believe there are multiple and equally valid, socially constructed realities instead of a singular

objective reality (Rapley, 2018). In interpretivism, “reality is constructed by the actor or research participant” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129). Knowledge is shaped based on the way others perceive it and is expressed through language (Crotty, 1998). The ways in which people speak shapes what and how things are seen, in which, these things that are molded by language “constitute reality” (Crotty, 1998, p. 88). The situations, events, practices, and meanings within one’s reality are shaped and understood through language. Meaning surfaces through interaction between the researcher and the focus of the research study (Ponterotto, 2005).

I believed meaning emerges when the interpreter and text form a relationship (Crotty, 1998). Texts transmitted beliefs, experiences, and values from one community to the next community of people. Texts described the historical and cultural intentions and histories of authors, the relationships between the interpreter and author, and the relevance of the texts for readers (Crotty, 1998). In the interpretivist paradigm, meaning is about understanding one’s self in relation to others and things in the world. The juxtaposition of the documents from the publishers, state, federal, and public websites about a literacy curriculum with an “evidence-based” label did helped me, as the researcher, to understand the function and relationships between the six areas of literacy, the teacher, the learner, and the learning context when implemented in high-needs schools. Aligned with the interpretivist worldview, this study was guided by two curriculum theories that explicated the intersect between people, context, and curriculum: The Four Commonplaces by Joseph Schwab (1973) and Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction.

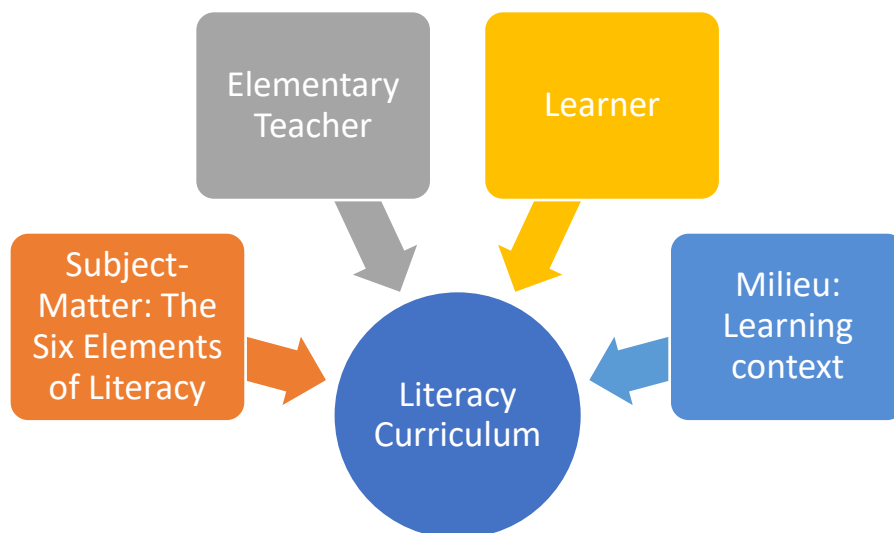
**Joseph Schwab’s Four Commonplaces.** A theoretical framework describes the researcher’s view on the assumptions about the human world and social life within the world (Crotty, 1998). The theoretical framework has a selected theory that supports the researcher’s

thinking about the approach and plan for research, including the relevant concepts and definitions in the research topic (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). As an interpretivist, I adopted a theoretical perspective that situates the research participants' realities within a holistic approach to curriculum and literacy instruction, Joseph Schwab's Four Commonplaces (see Figure 1). Schwab (1973) identifies four commonplaces in curriculum deliberation: subject-matter, teacher, learner, and milieu. The first commonplace, subject-matter, is the knowledge that children learn in a content area in school. Subject-matter includes the scholarly materials used to disseminate knowledge during a specific grade of schooling (Pyle & Luce-Kapler, 2014). Teachers' knowledge, the second commonplace, includes multiple factors that inform teacher practice such as knowledge of subject matter, instructional decisions, relatability to students, teachers, and administration, and educational beliefs. These factors are important in understanding the teachers' beliefs about the purpose of education and subsequently their practices.

The learners, the third commonplace, are mastering grade-level literacy skills with a group of peers in a learning context. Schwab (1973) states that knowledge about the age group, prior content knowledge, learning styles, and immediate desires and anxieties are important to understanding the learning experiences of a unique group of children. Knowledge about learners is a result of direct involvement with children in the learning space, too. The fourth commonplace, the milieu, are the learning contexts are the spaces where learning occurs for children (Schwab, 1973). The milieu are the contexts where children build and apply content knowledge. These milieu include the social, cultural, and historical dynamics of the classroom, school, family, and community. Schwab argues that these four commonplaces are crucial in curriculum development and excluded parts create an unbalanced curriculum.



This study identified how the Four Commonplaces were evident in literacy curricula that is described as evidence-based by publishing companies. The subject-matter included the five components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, reading comprehension, and vocabulary. Writing, an important component of literacy in Comprehensive Literacy Instruction in ESSA, was included in the subject matter, too. In total, the 5 components of reading and writing together made the six literacy elements that were the focus of the subject-matter in a literacy curriculum. The teacher represented the person teaching the minimal number of learners in an elementary school. The teacher was responsible for implementing the adopted evidence-based curriculum used to facilitated literacy learning within the six elements of literacy. The learner was a child in a classroom with age-group peers who were enrolled in an elementary school. The learner progressed and mastered skills across the six elements of literacy based on curriculum and instructional implementation. The milieu was described as the dynamics of the learning context where the interactions of teaching and learning occurred within the learning space. These dynamics included the physical classroom, state instructional framework, the curriculum instructional model, and the designated literacy block and schedule.

**Figure 1***Schwab's Four Commonplaces in Literacy Curriculum*

*Note.* This model shows how Schwab's commonplaces relate to literacy. The subject matter is the six elements of literacy and the milieu is the learning context.

Schwab's Four Commonplaces provide a flexible framework that I used to make sense of an instructional situation (Helms & Carlone, 1999). Helms and Carlone explain that each of the commonplaces are given equal attention in order to capture the uniqueness of a curriculum. The four commonplaces together provided a comprehensive view of the inclusiveness of a literacy curriculum that is labeled as "evidence-based" and adopted in high-needs schools. Moreover, the framework allows multiple interpretations of each of the commonplaces from different perspectives and situations.

Schwab (2013) describes curriculum development as a practical process of deliberation and decision-making described as a "complex, fluid, transactional discipline" directed to identifying learning objectives for a group of children (p. 595). Curriculum situations are not definite with fixed solutions (Connelly, 2013). Schwab argues that practical curriculum decisions are wise for a group of children or a school, but unwise to apply similar decisions for many groups

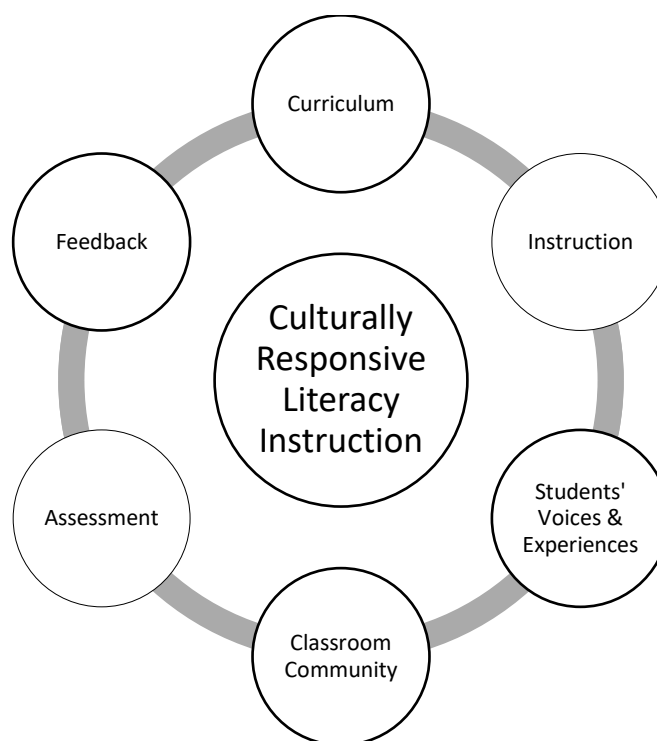
of children within a school, district, or state. Practical curriculum deliberations include identifying the issues of the curriculum and the continuing assessment of the school's culture in relation to the communities in service. In acknowledging the varied needs of culturally diverse learners, a culturally responsive framework helped to examine teachers' instructional decision-making during literacy curriculum implementation in their schools. While Schwab's Four Commonplaces guided the study's exploration of the literacy curriculum, Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction helped to understand how teachers implemented the literacy curriculum and made instructional decisions to support literacy learning amongst their culturally diverse learners.

**Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction.** A conceptual framework supports the researcher's understanding of the best way to explore the problem, the direction of the research, and the relationship amongst the variables in the study (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Grant and Osanloo (2014) argue that the conceptual framework provides a picture of "how ideas in a study relate to one another within the theoretical framework" (p. 17). Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction, a framework under Culturally Responsive Teaching, is the conceptual framework provides a picture of how culture, learners' experiences, and instruction are related to the function of the teacher in a literacy curriculum. Culturally Responsive Teaching empowers learners to improve their decision-making, problem-solving, and cognitive skills through the cultural and ethnic consciousness of oneself and others (Gay, 2010). Culturally Responsive Teaching focuses learning on the strengths of learners in their classrooms. Teaching involves understanding how learners conceptualize race, ethnicity, language, and culture (Paris & Alim, 2014). Culture is at the center of learning so teachers can reflect and change teaching practices to be more responsive

to learners' own ideas of knowledge (Klingner & Soltero-Gonzalez, 2009). Culturally Responsive Teaching includes acknowledging learners' cultures, building home-school relationships, incorporating various instructional strategies with cooperative learning (Bui & Fagan, 2013).

Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction (CRLI) supports literacy learning in classrooms by bridging home-school experiences, valuing learners' cultures and experiences, and adapting instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners (Callins, 2006). CRLI practices include communicating high expectations, facilitating learning, including cultural and communal participation from learners' families and community members, incorporating learner-facilitated discussions, and altering the curriculum to align with the students' backgrounds and interests. Callins argues that teachers who adopt Culturally Responsive Literacy Instructional practices "serve as the catalyst for improved reading achievement" for diverse learners (p. 64).

Adkins (2012) creates a model to describe four elements of CRLI in high school English classes: curriculum and instruction, students' voices and experiences, classroom community, and feedback and assessments (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2***Model of Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction*

*Note.* This model of Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction is based on Adkins (2012) model of Culturally Responsive English Instruction.

First, teachers utilize the curriculum and incorporate a variety of instructional practices to make connections with the lives of students. Second, teachers include students' voices and experiences by valuing students' contributions and demonstrating high expectations for learning. Third, teachers foster a classroom community that allows for collaborative learning. Last, teachers administer both formative and summative assessments and provide feedback to check for students' understanding of the targeted concept or skill. This study adopted Adkins (2012) model of CRLI to examine if there were opportunities to use learners' cultural background and experiences to support literacy learning within the areas of curriculum, instruction, students' voices and experiences, classroom community, assessments, and feedback.

Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction (CRLI) was the best framework to examine any opportunities where culture was valued as an important characteristic during curriculum implementation. CRLI helped to explore opportunities for learners to apply content knowledge and skills to real-world issues in the literacy curriculum. In relation to Schwab's Four Commonplaces framework, CRLI provided a picture of the influence of the incorporation of culture, learners' experiences, and knowledge in the presence of the six areas of literacy, the teacher, the learner, and the learning context. This study described the presence of culture, experiences, and knowledge the argument for the need of Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction with the implementation of a literacy curriculum with an "evidence-based" label is described in Chapter 5.

### **Subjectivities**

Peshkin (1988) writes that subjectivities are a union of one's class, societal statuses, and values that are interacting with a researcher's inquiry. I am a young, African American woman from the Southside of Chicago who grew up and attended high-needs schools in elementary school, middle school, and high school. Through my parents' determination and resilience to keep me on the path to excellence, I was involved in various after-school programs, community volunteer programs, church programs, summer camps, and educational enrichment opportunities from elementary school through high school. I was afforded the opportunity to meet diverse teachers, community members, and city leaders who nurtured me to look beyond my current circumstances and look at how I can become a change agent in the community.

Currently, I have built upon the ideas of determination and resilience from childhood to my college and teaching experiences as an adult. I am an African American college graduate from three Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) in the southeastern region of the United States. As a graduate of these secondary educational institutions, I understood that the world is

full of people from diverse cultures, religions, socioeconomic backgrounds, linguistic abilities, and other identities that shaped their ideas and experiences about teaching and learning. My personal identity as a member of a culturally diverse and historically marginalized group in the United States and my experiences of matriculating through high-needs schools foster my own interest to examining the influence of the adoption and implementation of literacy curricula in high-needs elementary schools.

As a former teacher in a high-needs elementary schools, I have both emic and etic experiences with literacy curriculum implementation (Ponterotto, 2005). Emic experiences include the behaviors and constructs that are unique to the individual within a social context whereas etic experiences are overarching beliefs that go beyond the limits of specific groups of people, cultures, and nations. As an educator, my emic experience with literacy curriculum implementation includes implementing a scripted curriculum whereas my etic experience with literacy curriculum includes developing a literacy curriculum with grade-level teammates, curriculum writing, and curriculum adoption as a classroom teacher. My first teaching experience began in a high-needs elementary school in an urban district. The school served a high immigrant and transient community. At the beginning of the year, each grade level team had to set academic objectives based on grade level standards, district pacing guide, previous test scores for grades first through fifth, and the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the students in each classroom. We, teachers, had to create learning targets, pretests, and posttests for each unit of learning in every content area. There were many grade-level, staff, and parent meetings on student data and student growth; however, I felt autonomous and responsive to teach literacy to my learners. I incorporated Culturally Responsive Literacy Instructional practices throughout my teaching in order to provide opportunities for my learners to use their cultural background and experiences to learn content

knowledge and apply literacy skills. Most importantly, school administration implemented grade level planning and colleague observations throughout the school year to encourage collaboration and observe lessons and practices that supported literacy learning for our culturally diverse learners.

My last classroom teaching experience occurred in a different high-needs elementary school in another urban district. This school had a high transient community similar to the previous school. The district mandated that the elementary schools in this region, which had a history of low reading scores on the state standardized tests, to use a scripted literacy program to teach phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency alongside the implementation of guided reading instruction using an explicit and direct instructional model. I had difficulty with implementing the scripted literacy curriculum because I was not comfortable teaching literacy from a manual because of the constraints of time and rote language in the script. Most of my students had different literacy needs than the skill of focus in the script, so there was a vast disconnection between what learners should learn according to the curriculum and what learners needed to learn. In addition, my teaching autonomy began to decline because of the constant professional development meetings on curriculum implementation and multiple observations and corrective feedback by school and district administration about the fidelity of implementing the curriculum. Both experiences with designing a literacy curriculum and implementing a scripted literacy curriculum encouraged me to explore the creation and adoption of curriculum and the experiences with curriculum implementation in high-needs schools.

With these differing curriculum experiences, I decided to make changes with curriculum adoption and implementation at the district level. I decided to become an elementary representative for curriculum writing and implementation in the content areas of Science and Literacy. As a



former elementary representative for literacy curriculum development in a high-needs school district, there was a small group of teachers who participated in discussions about the adoption and implementation of a literacy curriculum for their learners. Most of the members who participated in the discussion on curriculum adoption were other school and district personnel: literacy coaches, instructional coaches, assistant principals, and district coordinators. My teacher colleagues wanted to express their concerns about the literacy curriculum adopted for teacher implementation and literacy learning our high-needs school. In addition, they wanted to share their concerns without feeling devalued and unappreciated by the stakeholders who made decisions about curriculum adoption and implementation, but they were not afforded the same opportunity that I had as I participated in district level curriculum writing and curriculum adoption. I became a bridge between the classroom and district on curriculum and instruction for high-needs schools. I used my voice and position to discuss experiences with curriculum implementation in high-needs schools during discussions about curriculum adoption, reading achievement, and the opportunities to teach literacy to learners through the incorporation of culture, voices and experiences, and instructional strategies that encourage individual and collaborative learning.

### **Positionality**

For this research study, I positioned myself for the adoption of a literacy curriculum that argues it is evidenced-based if it has the following criteria: the inclusion of the commonplaces, discussed and adopted by multiple stakeholders including teachers, and provides opportunities for the inclusion of culture and context of learners. The conversation on curriculum adoption and implementation should include the positions from the publishers of the curriculum, federal, state, and local stakeholders in order to understand if the curriculum incorporates the six areas of literacy, the teacher, the learner, and the learning context. Moreover, this conversation should discuss

if the curriculum had opportunities to include culture, content knowledge, experiences with teaching and learning literacy. I believed it is important for conversations on curriculum adoption to include the positions from both inside and outside the classroom in order to understand the comprehensiveness of the curriculum and opportunities for teaching and learning that values literacy, culture, context, and instruction.

I acknowledged that I had my own biases on curriculum adoption and implementation of literacy curricula in high-needs elementary schools as I began this research study. I recognized that I may have similar lived experiences with curriculum implementation as other teachers in high-needs elementary schools. However, I understand that my curriculum adoption and implementation experiences may differ from teachers because I have experiences with curriculum design, writing, and adoption at the school and district level. With prior experiences with district-wide curriculum writing and adoption, my beliefs and ideas were included during the review and adoption of literacy curricula in high-needs elementary schools. Yet, I understood that my unique opportunities with curriculum writing, adoption, and implementation had implications for teaching and learning for one or many high-needs elementary schools where I served as an educator. My research study provided an opportunity for myself, as the researcher, to adopt the role of learner in order to examine the presence and relationships between the six areas of literacy, the teacher, the learner, and the learning context in a literacy curriculum that is labeled as “evidence-based” by the publishing company. During the examination of these four elements of curriculum, I explored the ways the curriculum afforded opportunities to incorporate culture, collaboration, and instructional strategies needed to support literacy learning for culturally diverse learners in high-needs schools.

## **Dissertation Overview**

This study examined the presence and relationships between the commonplaces in one literacy curriculum with an “evidence-based” label. Chapter two reviewed current literature that discuss the historical influence of educational policy on curriculum adoption in high-needs schools, challenges with teacher autonomy and teacher judgement with curriculum implementation, the gaps in research that implemented Schwab’s Four Commonplaces and Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction, and implications for this research study. Chapter three described the implementation of a case study design to examine and analyze multiple documents using document analysis and selecting coding from Schwab’s (1973) Four Commonplaces. The limitations of this study were examined in Chapter three, too. Chapter four presented the findings on the presence and relationships of the literacy elements, teacher, learner, and learning context in a curriculum. Also, this chapter described if there were opportunities to incorporate elements of CRLI across the commonplaces in the curriculum. Chapter five discussed the implications of literacy curriculum with the “evidence-based” label, curriculum adoption, teacher instructional decision-making, and the need for Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction in high-needs schools.

## **2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of the presence and relationships between the literacy elements, teacher, learner, and learning context within a literacy curriculum as defined by Joseph Schwab's (1973) *Four Commonplaces of Curriculum Development* and *Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction*. The research questions were:

1. What is the function of the literacy elements, teacher, learner and learning context in a literacy curriculum?
2. What relationships exist between the literacy elements, teacher, learner, and learning context in the literacy curriculum?

This chapter describes the complexities of a literacy curriculum that argues it is evidence-based and teacher literacy instructional decision-making and practices in high-needs urban schools. The chapter begins with an overview of the historical influence of educational policy on curriculum in high-needs schools followed by a discussion of research on academic achievement in literacy learning for students in high-needs schools. Research associated with teachers' experiences with implementing a literacy curriculum that argues it is evidence-based in relation to teacher decision-making. Lastly, this chapter describes current research that utilized Schwab's *Four Commonplaces* and *Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction* as frameworks to examining literacy curriculum and teacher instructional decisions. I present this review of research to explain the need for research on the adoption and implementation of literacy curricula with an "evidence-based" label in high-needs elementary schools.

### **Identification and Rationale of Sources**

Information on educational policy beginning with President Johnson's War on Poverty up to and including President Obama's Common Core legislation was located through multiple sources including the U.S. Department of Education website, books, and related published articles. I searched for all sources on the ERIC databases in the Georgia State University library website using terms "teacher perceptions" and "literacy" initially. This resulted in hundreds of articles on the topic of literacy, curriculum, and instruction. To refine this search, I chose literature that specifically stated literacy curriculum or scripted literacy curriculum in an urban school, poverty, or high-needs school in the abstract. This study incorporated articles that were published after the 2002 enactment of No Child Left Behind and the 2015 reauthorization of ESSA to identify any congruence among definitions and interpretations of literacy, curriculum, instruction, and high-needs schools. In addition, this research study incorporated literature within and outside the United States to show the significance of teacher perceptions, literacy, curriculum, and instruction.

I used "Schwab" and "Four Commonplaces" as search engine words to locate current research that implemented Schwab's Four Commonplaces framework. I had two articles on Joseph Schwab's (1973) Four Commonplaces from a curriculum course, but I searched for more articles that discussed or applied this framework in current literature on curriculum development and adoption. With this search, I found one article that used all four commonplaces in the research (Pyle & Luce-Kapler, 2014). I used "Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction" as another search engine tool to find current literature describing teacher implementation and student learning using this framework. The Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction search retrieved a few articles using the exact phrases, so I had to use other words that fell under the Culturally Respon-

sive Teaching umbrella (Gay, 2010): Culturally Responsive Teaching in literacy (Keehne, Sarsona, Kawakami, & Au, 2018), and Culturally Responsive English Instruction (Adkins, 2012). These articles provided research that discussed how culture, learner’s experiences, and instructional strategies supported literacy learning with culturally diverse learners.

### **Historical Influence of Educational Policy on Curriculum in Urban Schools**

In this chapter, I examine the influence of educational policy on curriculum in high-needs schools in order to discuss the historical relationship between policies and communities serving culturally diverse learners in urban areas (see Figure 3 below). This examination of policy in high-needs communities related two of Schwab’s (1973) Four Commonplaces: subject matter and milieu. As described in the previous chapter, Schwab describes the subject-matter as content and educational materials used for instruction. The milieus include the ethnic and class structure of the students (Schwab, 1973).

**Figure 3**

*Chronology of Educational Policy in High-Needs Schools*



From the 1960s until today, the United States government has passed legislation that directly affected students in low-income communities. Under the War on Poverty initiative, President Lyndon Johnson encouraged the Department of Education (DOE) and U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) to “break the cycle of poverty through better education” (Grossen,

1996, p. 4). In 1965, OEO created Project Head Start, a federally funded program designed to provide students from high-needs communities with skills necessary to be successful in public school (Razfar & Gutierrez, 2013). Project Head Start was identified as a comprehensive program designed to support the emotional, social, nutritional, health, and psychological needs of low-income families (Office of Head Start, n.d.). Head Start designed an Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF) that identifies five broad areas of learning to show a continuum of learning from infancy to pre-school: Approaches to Learning, Social and Emotional Development, Language and Literacy, Cognition, and Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development. These five areas provided a holistic focus to developing foundational skills that young students should learn from birth to five before entering public school. Specifically, the Language and Literacy objectives focus on phonological awareness, print and alphabet knowledge, comprehension and text structure, and writing skills. Project Head Start was an early example of federal programs targeting students in high-needs communities (milieu) to learn literacy skills (subject matter) necessary for preparation for public school.

Similar to Head Start's ELOF, researchers Carl Bereiter and Siegfried Englemann created a direct instruction approach to literacy in pre-school for students served in high-needs communities. Bereiter and Englemann (1966) believed that children in high-needs communities needed a narrowed curriculum that focused on academic objectives. The pre-school program consisted of 15 academic objectives that pertained to language and speech development, numeracy, and reading skills they deemed necessary of public schools' success. They argued that the success of the program depended on strict time and subject scheduling, appropriate physical facilities, behavior management based on reward and punishment, parent and community cooperation, and "effective" teachers.

This type of educational approach aligned with what Freire (2009) described the banking concept of education as an act of depositing knowledge from the knowledgeable (teachers) to the unknowledgeable (students). In this model of education, Freire explained that teachers are content experts who think, talk, choose programs, and control the learning process for learners in classrooms. Bereiter and Englemann (1966) explained the importance for teachers to learn specific teaching strategies in a “straightforward ‘how-to-do-it’ manner” in order to deposit literacy skills that students in low-income communities need for public school (p. 104). Bereiter and Englemann argued that a proficient teacher applied teaching techniques with fidelity without deviating from the script and refraining from incorporating their individual ideas into their teaching. In doing so, programs could “regulate” how students internalize literacy learning (Bereiter & Englemann, 1966).

To expand the work of Project Head Start and Bereiter and Englemann for preschool children in low-income communities, the DOE and the OEO created and allocated millions of federal dollars to Project Follow Through. Project Follow Through, beginning in the late 1960s, searched for the most effective way to teach low-income students from kindergarten to third grade (National Institute for Direct Instruction, n.d.). This federal experiment compared basic academic skills, problem-solving skills, and self-esteem of learners across 22 models in 180 low-performing elementary schools across the United States. The National Institute for Direct Instruction (NIFDI) reported students achieved higher academic achievement using the Direct Instruction model. Those differences were attributed to the effectiveness of Direct Instruction’s effectiveness of evidence-based strategies for literacy development. NIFDI describes Direct Instruction, created by Englemann, as a model that focuses on clear instruction based on prescribed



teaching tasks and planned lessons to improve learning. Although the NIFDI report showed academic achievement for elementary schools serving low-income communities, Kim and Axelrod (2005) discuss the criticisms of the Direct Instruction programs, including the shift from child-centered to teacher-centered learning. The authors discuss how Direct Instruction promoted rote learning instead of engaging and culturally specific learning activities designed for children from low-income communities. Instructional elements, such as rote learning and scripts, remain as components in current mandated curriculum.

Despite federal funds dedicated to finding a standardizable curriculum for students in low-income communities, the opinion about public schools continued to decline. *A Nation at Risk* (ANAR), under President Ronald Reagan's administration in the 1980s, was a response to failing school reforms of the 1960s. The ANAR report informed citizens that "the nation would be harmed economically and socially unless education was dramatically improved for all children" (Ravitch, 2010, p. 25) and schools around the nation scurried to fix the issues (Ogden, 2002). The report recommended higher standards for academic performance, stronger high school graduation rates, and an increased rigor for teacher preparation programs; however, there were not recommendations for any evidence-based curriculum to support these recommendations for school improvement.

*A Nation at Risk's* emphasis on the curriculum continued the push for the standards movement in education which started during the legislation in the 1960s. School districts adopted state standards alongside legislative mandates to show student achievement. School administration began to respond to the public concern by narrowing the focus to what and how students were learning in classrooms (Hunt, 2008). At the school level, school administrators focused on improving student performance across grade-level content areas. During this time, the nation's

education “crisis” continued the conversation from what and how learning should unfold in schools serving learners from high-needs communities.

McClure (2005) explains that the standards movement did not align theoretically to what occurred in classrooms. Teachers had to change their knowledge of content and shift their teaching practices. The responsibility of teacher development was shifted from local school boards to state legislative offices. State policymakers created a standard for teacher professional development that included learning about student content standards and teaching strategies for implementing those standards in their classrooms. McClure argues that the standards movement included reforming student content standards, changing teacher practice, and shifting local school control to state control over teaching and learning.

Standards-based practices have a lengthy history in this country, particularly for students in low-income communities. Each new policy and curriculum brought with it a laser focus on teaching academic content to students in low-income communities (McClure, 2005). The framework minimized student capital and teacher expertise while elevating the importance of consistency in the way in which achievement is revealed, through learning standards, which has paved the way for a national program in the 1990s: Comprehensive School Reforms.

Comprehensive Schools Reform (CSR) is a national, federally supported program targeting the improvement of teaching and learning in high-needs schools that serve students from low-income communities. Beginning in the 1990s, CSR purportedly gave schools serving low-income students of color more educational opportunities under 11 federally approved models. CSR models should include 11 characteristics: employ scientifically-based (now referred to as evidence-based) strategies based on research, a comprehensive design with aligned components, on-going professional development teachers and staff, measurable goals for student achievement,

support by school staff, parental involvement in school improvement, high-quality technical support, annual plans for school improvement evaluation, resources needed to sustain the school's reform effort and the requirement for significant improvements in academic achievement (Shippen, Houchins, Calhoon, Furlow, & Sartor, 2006). The 1997 passage of the Comprehensive Schools Reform Demonstration Act allocated millions of dollars to high-poverty and low-performing schools (Harris, 2011). Participating schools received on-going professional development, curriculum resources, and parental involvement support from curriculum coaches and publishers of the curriculum. Shippen and colleagues (2006) argued that CSR models, such as *Success for All* and *Direct Instruction*, were considered most effective in high-poverty and low-income schools because of the research-based curriculum of these reform models. The CSR movement became widely accepted and adopted in the educational practices in urban schools. In 2002, CSR movement became law under Title I, Part F of the ESEA, better known as No Child Left Behind, in order to increase student achievement (Durden, 2008). The federal government officially began to measure the success of high-needs schools based on the continuous improvement of school-wide assessment scores in literacy and mathematics (McClure, 2005).

As high-needs schools began to implement schoolwide reform to increase academic achievement for students in low-income communities, national organizations fueled research that identified elements of literacy that could be measured and achieved by all students, including students from low-income communities. The National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development (2000) published the *Report of the National Reading Panel*, reporting on experimental research in early reading development. The findings in this report argued for positive results for systematic learning in phonemic awareness and phonics instruction in early literacy development through approaches such as *Reading First*. *Reading First*, alongside No Child Left

Behind and CSR programs, allocated federal funds to states that showed evidence of research-based instructional practices and districts that implemented programs backed by scientific evidence (Durden, 2008; Hassett, 2008; Irvine & Larson, 2007; Powell, Cantrell, & Correll, 2017). The findings from these reports yielded the five elements of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, reading fluency, and reading comprehension (Hassett, 2008). Literacy programs that claimed to have scientific research support were the benchmark of teaching literacy and received federal funds from the United States government.

In response to *Reading First*, publishing companies developed literacy curricula that were scripted so districts could show annual yearly progress (Irvine & Larson, 2007). The companies designed the curricula to ensure that “anyone” could implement the program once they learned how to follow the script (Powell, Cantrell, & Correll, 2017, p. 94). Urban school districts allocated funds to scripted literacy curricula to demonstrate accountability for student achievement to the government and other stakeholders. Districts found scripted literacy curricula “hard to resist” in achieving raised test scores in the age of accountability and testing under NCLB (Parsons & Harrington, 2009, p. 748). Scripted literacy programs, such as *Success for All*, *Direct Instruction*, *Open Court*, and *America’s Choice*, were promised as “quick fixes” to low literacy scores in districts (Irvine & Larson, 2007, p. 49). The adoption of scripted literacy curricula ensured urban schools continued to receive federal funding for curriculum, professional development, and school resources needed to increase reading achievement.

The Obama administration continued to promote research-based literacy instruction in policy legislation through the Common Core Standards (Coles, 2013). The Council of Chief State Schools Officers and the National Governors Association created the Common Core Stand-

ards in 2009. Alongside Common Core, President Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan gave states Race to the Top federal funds if they adopted Common Core Standards. Goatley and Hinchman (2013) argue that publishing companies aligned with Common Core standards and marketed literacy curriculum materials as effective and in alignment with new federal regulations.

President Obama signed the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act under Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The goal for the reauthorization for ESSA was to provide all U.S. students with a clear path for college and careers. ESSA builds upon previous legislation, including the importance of evidence-based interventions, the implementation of high academic standards, accountability and action for schools serving high-needs students, and quality instruction. Today, under ESSA, most states have the flexibility to implement a comprehensive school-wide plan to demonstrate yearly progress in student achievement. However, many school districts still adopt scripted literacy programs because of claims by publishing companies to be research-based and to support increased test scores (Powell, Cantrell, & Correll, 2017) and to be virtually “teacher-proof”.

The educational legislation since 1960s has shown the relationship between subject matter and milieu as defined by Schwab’s Four Commonplaces. Federal policy and programs have defined the standards of curriculum and literacy learning for students in low-income communities. In addition, literacy programs shape teachers’ limited role in curriculum implementation to support students’ achievement in literacy within high-needs schools. The next section will review research that focus on the disparities of literacy achievement for high-needs schools as it relates to the learner, milieu, and the subject-matter.

## **The Gaps in Achievement in Urban Schools**

The achievement gap has been the focus of national and state level education policies in the United States for a long time (Chatterji, 2006; Jones, 1984; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Palumbo & Kramer-Vida, 2012; Paschall, Gershoff, & Kuhfeld, 2018). Academic achievement gaps by race/ethnicity were the central issue in American education, especially the comparison of Black and White students on achievement tests as the “benchmark for schools’ performances” (Levine & Levine, 2011, p. 447; Paschall, Gershoff, & Kuhfeld, 2018). Specifically, Teale, Paciga, and Hoffman (2007) describes the literacy gap as a disparity in reading and writing scores of children in poverty communities in comparison to children in middle and high socioeconomic communities. The authors argue that the literacy gap is an urban schools’ issue due to the high percentage of African American and Latinx students situated in urban areas. Paschall, Gershoff, and Kuhfeld (2018) state that federal programs, such as Project Head Start, Project Follow Through, and No Child Left Behind, were designed to decrease the achievement gap and increase school readiness for high poverty Black children. However, Jones (1984), in looking at Black-White achievement differences on SAT scores, declared that no educational or social program had a direct effect on narrowing the achievement gap. Instead, research suggests that despite policies targeting achievement improvement among students in low-income communities, the achievement gap has intensified since the enactment of No Child Left Behind (Beecher & Sweeny, 2008; Chatterji, 2006; Palumbo & Kramer-Vida, 2012).

One study examined reading achievement gaps across ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic levels from Kindergarten to first grade (Chatterji, 2006). Using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.), Chatterji found significant reading disparities in African Americans, boys, and students from low-income communities.

In comparing data on ethnicity, this study found that the reading gap increased from entry to Kindergarten, end of Kindergarten, and first grade. This study suggests that the reading achievement gap widened significantly from entry to Kindergarten to first grade for low socioeconomic groups in comparison to their higher socioeconomic peers.

Matthews and Kizzie (2010), in continuing the work by Chatterji (2006), looked at the literacy gaps between African American and White children from Kindergarten to 5<sup>th</sup> grade. The authors focused on explaining racial and gender gaps in literacy by focusing on social and behavior skills that may cause academic difficulty. Using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort, Matthews and Kizzie found that differences in learning-related skills (LRS), a group of social skills such as academic persistence, organization, and learning independence that facilitate active and efficient learning, were influential on literacy gaps amongst African American boys in comparison to African American girls and White peers. This article continues to show the literacy disparities of low-income students under standards-based federal legislation as it relates to the subject matter, milieu, and student.

Scammacca, Fall, Capin, Roberts, and Swanson (2019) sought to continue research focusing on academic growth and changes in achievement gap over time. The authors examined student growth across grades one through five for 2 years using assessment data from STAR Reading and STAR Math in a large, high-needs district. The findings show that students starting in a lower initial achievement had an accelerated growth across the school year. In reading growth, students moved out of the bottom quartile after two years. However, the growth in reading scores was not enough to raise achievement to the level of average student scores over a two-year span. The drastic differences in scores between groups by fifth grade continue to sustain

reading achievement gaps in elementary schools. This research shows that literacy disparities arise amongst students in a high-needs schools under current federal legislation.

With the focus on the widening achievement gap in literacy, there is research which argues that a small number of schools have successfully narrowed the achievement gap through a variety of instructional strategies, including small class sizes, the use of standards-based practices, and teacher expectations (Williams, 2011). Beecher and Sweeney (2008) discuss a blended approach of a rigorous curriculum and school-wide teaching and learning as a methodology to narrowing the achievement gap in one school serving multiple ethnic and socioeconomic groups. The school improvement plan included identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the school which resulted in a collective school mission, instructional goals, learning objectives, and specific action plans. Teachers received extensive professional development to learn various strategies to support learning for their students in their classrooms. The authors argue that this school's success was based on an increase in student achievement and a reduction in the achievement gap, student engagement and ownership of the learning, parental involvement in the school, and teacher commitment to their students.

Overall, the previous research studies show negative trends in narrowing the achievement gaps across grade levels in urban elementary schools. The achievement gap continues to persist for children in urban schools, even after the reauthorization of ESSA in 2015. Research focusing on reading achievement gaps investigated other factors impacting reading achievement, such as teacher quality, small class sizes, instructional time allotted for reading, reading in homes, punitive disciplinary actions, behavior modification techniques, and student attendance (Chatterji, 2006; Matthews & Kizzie, 2010). However, the research did not include how curriculum influenced reading achievement gaps for students in urban schools. The next paragraph presents the



argument on the influence of curriculum in understanding the achievement gaps seen in urban schools.

The curriculum gap is the absence of sufficient attention to curriculum elements needed for teaching and learning success in reading and writing (Teale, Paciga, & Hoffman, 2007). Under accountability legislation, reading instruction in early grades focus on phonemic awareness, fluency, and decoding while limiting attention to content knowledge, reading comprehension, and writing. Teale and associates found that primary teachers believed if they teach word recognition, then students will learn to comprehend. The writers explain that this perspective is problematic for urban children because large numbers of children in urban schools have historically failed to master phonics and fluency. In addition, they argue that the attention on word recognition diminishes the importance for teachers to consider the quality of children's literature.

In effect, the curriculum gap cheats children in urban schools out of quality instruction in content knowledge, reading comprehension, and writing. Teale, Paciga, and Hoffman (2007) argue that scores on K-3 tests measuring phonics, word recognition, and fluency will increase, but believe reading for comprehension and content knowledge will suffer starting in fourth grade and continue through middle and high schools. Teale and colleagues further argue that writing instruction is limited to an absence of literacy instruction in high-needs schools because mandated literacy programs focus on phonics, word recognition, and fluency. It appears that a scripted curriculum limits the focus of literacy skills taught to students in high-needs schools.

This section reviewed research which focus on achievement gaps in literacy of African American students in high-needs schools. Although there a few articles that report schools that have narrowed that achievement gap, there is more research showing the achievement gap con-

tinues to exist for students in high-needs schools. The articles show how federal legislation influences the subject-matter, milieu, and learner through the implementation of scripted curriculum. However, the research did not discuss the commonplace that has an important relationship to curriculum implementation as it relates to the subject matter, learner, and milieu: teacher.

### **Teachers' Experiences with Implementing a Literacy Curriculum**

Teachers throughout the United States express conflicting positions of implementing federal literacy initiatives or equitable instructional practices for their students (Dresser, 2012). Some teachers share how the constraining literacy curriculum disregard the social dynamic of learning (Parhar & Sensory, 2011) while others felt confined to the language in the script (Powell, Cantrell, & Correll, 2017). In one study, Gatto (2007) argued that her school district expected each teacher to use the purchased literacy program “as described in the teacher’s manual” (p. 75). The focus on the subject matter starts to overshadow the importance of the teacher, learner, and milieu in the curriculum (Schwab, 1973). As a result, there is an imbalanced view of the interplay between the commonplaces within the curriculum.

Wang (2011) conducted interviews with elementary teachers in various types of schools that implemented a new literacy curriculum reform starting in 2001. All elementary teachers shared that the new literacy content was too high, and the demand exceeded the time allotted for literacy instruction. For teachers in lower income communities, they expressed that their students needed more time to learn literacy in comparison to their higher income peers because more time was needed to build background knowledge on unfamiliar objects, phrases, and places. This study illustrates how the focus on subject matter can devalue other important elements to curriculum and learning (Schwab, 1973).

With the focus on the subject matter, teachers expressed feeling pressure from parents, community members, and the media to use adopted phonics programs (Campbell, 2018). Kavanagh and Fisher-Ari (2017) discussed how schools implementing Success for All (SFA) allowed various stakeholders to enter classrooms and assess teachers for their accuracy with implementing the script. Teachers felt confused by the conflicting expectations from education program instructors, university professors, school and district administration, and SFA coaches. School administration and corporate leaders reinforced the need for teachers to “stick to the script” by monitoring the precision of pacing through the script (Powell, Cantrell, & Correll, 2017). The authors stated that teachers discussed how coaches from the publishing companies took manuals out of teachers’ hands during instruction if they were not correctly following the pacing. Furthermore, Dresser (2012) discussed how teachers felt powerless and overwhelmed in a school climate where administration mandated a scripted literacy curriculum such as this. It appears that teachers can be caught in an emphasis on *when* to teach versus *what* to teach their students.

Research explains the value of teachers applying culturally responsive teaching practices (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014) in their classrooms; yet, teachers who read about and apply critical literacy practices and challenge grade-level reading textbooks are censured by administration (Coles, 2013). The study by Costello (2005) accounts one teacher’s experience with questioning the mandated curriculum and instructional strategies as not positive. When the teacher had questions or concerns about what school leadership deemed as “best practices” (p. 57), he was viewed as an unqualified teacher. The study reported that a “good” teacher is one who used what is required by administration (p. 56). Fang, Fu, and Lamme (2004) argue

that the mandate for scripted curriculum creates a learning environment where teachers are pressured to adhere to state curriculum guidelines, which decreases teacher morale and personal professional development.

This section describes research that focuses on teachers' experiences of literacy curriculum implementation in high-needs schools. Overall, teachers shared the devaluing and powerless experience of teaching literacy to their students when the curriculum has the most value. There is an imbalance of learning in the curriculum when the subject-matter has more of a focus than the teacher, learner, and milieu. The following section focuses another important aspect of the teacher commonplace: teacher decision-making with literacy curriculum implementation.

### **Teacher Decision-Making in Using a Literacy Curriculum**

A curriculum that allows for teacher autonomy can create space for teachers to make instructional decisions. Hoyle and John (1995) define teacher autonomy as a "teacher's freedom to construct a personal pedagogy" (p. 92). However, Foucault recognizes that teachers bring various experiences and therefore autonomy in schools is an acknowledgement of capabilities and limitations (Raaen, 2011). Freedom to exercise one's own pedagogy and expertise is important to teacher autonomy; however, in order to do so, autonomy relies on school leadership to sanction self-governing decisions that provides opportunities for teachers to make choices about the vision and issues within the school (Aleksander, 2015). The concept of autonomy is synonymous with "self-determination, authenticity, and self-concordance" (Wichmann, 2011, p. 17) and is fueled by a love for learning, a love for children, and a sense of collegiality (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). Teacher autonomy has been associated with lower attrition rates, higher teacher motivation, increased student learning autonomy, and increased teacher decision-making teacher autonomy increases teacher decision-making (Parker, 2015; Torres, 2014). Autonomy describes

how teachers are creative in intersecting the commonplaces in the curriculum in constrained learning environments (Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2013).

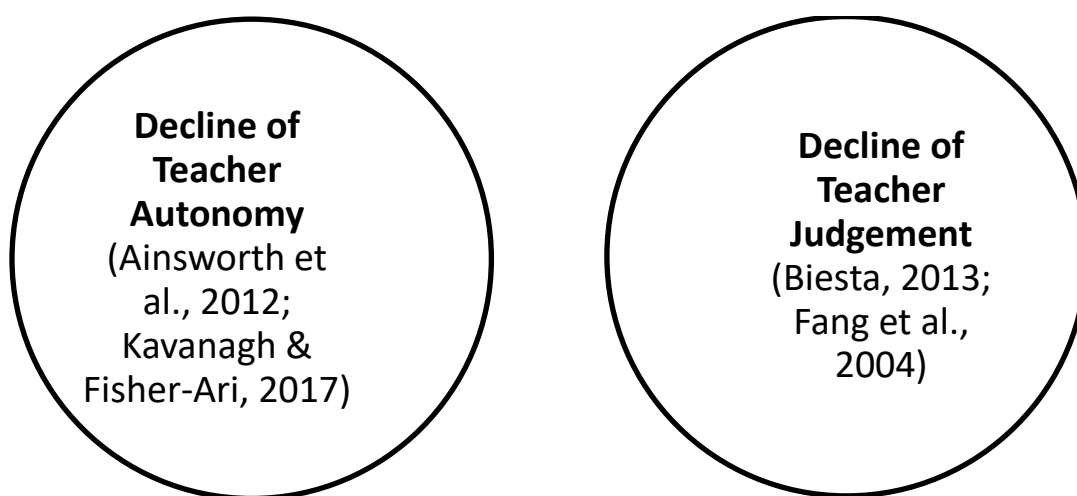
Teacher autonomy influences teacher decision-making. Teachers make decisions about curriculum, teaching, and student learning outcomes prior to teaching (Johnson & Matthews, 2015). Teachers use a combination of their teaching experiences, teacher preparation, school mentoring and coaching, along with knowledge of students' cultural practices and learning styles to make decisions on student learning (Gay, 2010). Teacher decision-making directly involves the use of various instructional strategies to support student learning in the classroom within a given curriculum (Johnson & Matthews, 2015). Stuart, Rinaldi, and Averill (2011) argue that a teacher's ability to plan instruction is based on one's personal views of student achievement. Teachers with the autonomy, or freedom, to choose their own pedagogy and teaching strategies to support student learning were more motivated and effective in teaching. Moreover, teachers make learning opportunities for students to exhibit creativity and practical application of content, instead of creating and utilizing a one-size-fits-all plan (Gay, 2010; Stuart, Rinaldi, & Averill, 2011).

As discussed earlier, research has found that teachers expressed a lack of autonomy in teaching literacy because the opportunities for instructional decision-making declined when implementing a scripted literacy curriculum (Kavanagh & Fisher-Ari, 2017). Ainsworth, Ortlieb, Cheek, Pate, and Feters (2012) conducted research on teachers' perceptions of implementing a state ELA curriculum in first-grade classrooms. The authors observed and interviewed four first-grade teachers from a large urban district about their 90-minute literacy instruction block. The authors shared that the teachers felt confident in implementing a scripted curriculum, but the pacing and the instruction negatively influenced creativity and "teachable moments." Moreover,

teachers express concerns with pedagogical agency in the classrooms due to the enforcement of standardized testing that constrains teaching creativity, the presence of limited resources needed to respond to culturally and historically marginalized students, and the lack of time dedicated to on-going professional development on pedagogical views of teaching students in high-needs schools (Ainsworth et al., 2012; Parhar & Sensory, 2011). With constant observations and pressure from school administration, district leaders, and publisher representatives, elementary teachers felt a lack of self-governance and decision-making in implementing a scripted literacy curriculum.

#### **Figure 4**

*The Decline of Teacher Autonomy and Teacher Judgement on Instructional Decision-Making*



Biesta (2013) argues that there is a decline in teacher judgement due to the interference of policy makers in the decision-making processes in education. “The rise of top-down prescription of both the content and the form of education has significantly diminished the opportunities for teachers to exert judgement-both individually and collectively” (p. 690). Fang, Fu, and Lamme (2004) share that teachers began to take a passive role in judging their teaching practice. In a

monthly meeting with elementary teachers, Fang and colleagues noticed that teachers were presenting instructional issues in their classrooms instead of learning how other teachers implemented effective literacy practices in their classrooms. The teachers arrived at the meetings expecting judgement or instructional support from the facilitators. Dresser (2012) explains that mandated programs change the teacher's role to "transmitter of knowledge" (p. 72). Teachers speed through content material within a prescribed amount of instructional time which results in superficial teaching of content knowledge and skills (Go, 2012). Teachers are the controllers of the flow of information to students.

The rigidity of some mandated literacy programs on teacher decision-making and culturally responsive practices has been found to influence students as well. Gibson and Patrick (2008) examined the impact of a mandated literacy program, Additional Literacy Support (ALS). They investigated the influence of lesson scripts on teacher pedagogy of teacher assistants in seven-year-old classrooms. Gibson and Patrick share three problems with lesson scripts that focus on literacy instruction while ignoring student learning: the lack of teacher guidance for student ideas or thoughts, a lack of building on students' experiences outside of what is taught in previous lessons, and a decreased student motivation and willingness to learn.

This section discussed the influence of teacher instructional decision-making with literacy curriculum implementation. Ultimately, the research showed the focus on the subject matter in the curriculum and the decline of teacher autonomy and professional judgment excludes "what is best or good or satisfying for the learner" (Schwab, 1973, p. 511). Overall, the teacher, as a crucial component in curriculum implementation, was an unequal element among the four commonplaces that is directly influenced by the focus on literacy elements in literacy curriculum. The next section will review research that includes Schwab's Four Commonplace and Culturally

Responsive Literacy Instruction as frameworks for examining curriculum and instructional decision-making to support literacy learning for culturally diverse learners in high-needs schools.

### **Schwab's Four Commonplaces and CRLI**

Research on individual commonplaces, such as the teacher and the subject-matter, is extensive and has helped inform the field of teaching and learning (Olson & Craig, 2009). However, it was my argument that the interplay among the four commonplaces is necessary for understanding literacy curricula with an “evidence-based” label. Minimal research using Schwab's Four Commonplaces as a theoretical framework or analysis tool exist. For example, one study of Japanese high-school students' narratives of their learning experiences in an ESL classroom used Schwab's Four Commonplaces as an analytic tool (Kanno & Applebaum, 1995). Another study examining collaborative curriculum making among middle school physical education teachers used the commonplaces as part of their theoretical framework (Craig, You, & Oh, 2013). However, one study directly related to elementary level learners and the comprehensiveness of teaching and learning was found. Pyle and Luce-Kapler (2014) examined the interplay of Schwab's Four Commonplaces in Kindergarten classrooms to examine how the subject matter, learning context, teacher, and learner aligned with contemporary ideas of education, curriculum, teaching, and learning. Pyle and Luce-Kapler's study illustrates that all four commonplaces have an important role in learning in classrooms. Their description of the interplay of the commonplaces aligns with the participants' beliefs about instruction. The teachers describe the importance of communicating clear instructional expectations with learners, supportive peer learning, collaborative teacher and student discussions, learner feedback, and fostering a positive learning environment. While the researchers do not explicitly identify the importance of cultural backgrounds



of students within teachers' instructional beliefs and practices, many features of Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction (e.g., expectations) were inferred in the study.

Research using a form of CRLI (i.e.: culturally responsive instruction in literacy, culturally responsive English instruction) found the importance of incorporating learners' cultural backgrounds, values, and experiences as the foundation for increasing literacy achievement (Adkins, 2012; Keehne, Sarsona, Kawakami, & Au, 2018; Shealey, 2007; Stoicovy, Fee, & Fee, 2012). Teachers believed effective literacy instruction is based on a learning environment that values the display of care, communicating high expectations, acknowledging the role of language and communication in learning, and showing sensitivity to learners' learning styles are valued characteristics (Shealey, 2007). Research that focused on elementary learners' outcomes in literacy achievement acknowledged an increase in story retelling, word recognition, and reading comprehension when Culturally Responsive Instructional strategies were implemented by teachers (Bui & Fagan, 2013; Stoicovy, Fee, & Fee, 2012).

**Gaps in literature using Four Commonplaces and CRLI.** The current research uses qualitative research methods to gather information about the presence of the Four Commonplaces and opportunities for CRLI within literacy curriculum implementation. Research incorporating the Four Commonplaces look at Kindergarten classrooms, middle school teachers, and high school students. Researchers examining CRLI practices focus on second and third grade teachers, fifth grade students, and high school English teachers as participants in their data collection. There is limited research that includes a breadth of data on curriculum adoption and implementation, which provides a limited view of the presence and relationships of the Four Commonplaces and instructional practices in Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction practices. Although the research on literacy, curriculum, and instruction in elementary schools focus on the

negative impact of curriculum adoption and implementation, there is limited research that focus on how the elements of literacy, teacher, learner, and learning context were present and interact with one another during teaching and learning opportunities. Overall, current literature examines the challenges and issues with curriculum and adoption of literacy curriculum that is labeled as “evidence-based”; however, the corpus of research needs to examine literacy curricula using a comprehensive framework and a critical framework to determine the inclusion of content, people, context, and instruction for high-needs schools.

### **Implications**

Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, and Karnik (2009) argue that researchers misrepresent theories by selecting one or few of the main elements. Tudge and colleagues explain that studies that do not explicitly represent theories mislead fellow researchers about the components of the theory and prevents a “fair test of the theory” (p. 198). This research study examines the presence and relationships between Schwab’s commonplaces in one literacy curriculum that argues it is evidence-based by the publishing company. In continuing the work of Pyle and Luce-Kapler (2014), the application of Schwab’s Four Commonplaces (1973), as a framework for curriculum development, in this study provided a theoretical approach to understanding the inclusiveness of a literacy curriculum that argues it is evidence-based by the publishing company. This study used multiple documents from different sources to describe the beliefs and ideas about the function of and the relationships between the commonplaces in a literacy curriculum that is adopted in high-needs elementary schools.

This research study focused on the presence and relationships of the commonplaces in a literacy curriculum adopted in high-needs schools. The intent of this research study was to un-

derstand how the curriculum's publishers, federal and state stakeholders, and teachers with experiences of curriculum implementation perceived the comprehensiveness of a literacy curriculum that is adopted in high-needs elementary schools. These stakeholders shared beliefs and ideas about the inclusion and relationships between the six areas of literacy, the teacher, the learner, and the learning context in a literacy instruction. This research study included promotional documents from the publishing company that describe the lived experiences of elementary teachers and their beliefs about the function and interactions between the six areas of literacy elements, teacher, learner, and learning context during curriculum implementation as it related to teaching literacy to learners in their classrooms. With the examination of the presence and relationships between the commonplaces, this research study will argue the need for practices in Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction in high-needs schools.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

Current research on literacy curricula identified as evidence-based and adopted in high-needs schools discuss the inclusion of teachers' perceptions through multiple sources of data (Ainsworth et al., 2012; Fang, Fu, & Lamme, 2004; Irvine & Larson, 2007; Kavanagh & Fisher-Ari, 2017; Powell, Cantrell, & Correll, 2017). This chapter described how a case study design allowed me to examine the presence and relationships between the six areas of literacy, the teacher, the learner, and the learning context within one literacy curriculum with an "evidence-based" label that is adopted and implemented in high-needs elementary schools. This study used Schwab's Four Commonplaces, as the theoretical framework to guide the study design by considering four important elements: six literacy elements, the learner, the teacher, and the learning context. Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction, the conceptual framework, supported the examination of opportunities for teacher instructional decision-making within the curriculum. The research questions were:

1. What is the function of the literacy elements, teacher, learner and learning context in a literacy curriculum?
2. What relationships exist between the literacy elements, teacher, learner, and learning context in the literacy curriculum?

#### **Research Design**

Case study, as a methodology, closely examines people or phenomena (Hays, 2004). Hays (2004) writes that the aim of a case study is to discover new and different explanations and interpretations of cases in a short period of time. Yin (2003), Merriam (1998), and Stake (1995) are proponents of case study research. Yin, Merriam, and Stake believe that researchers need to

bind the case, or phenomenon in question, in order to specify what will and will not be in the research inquiry (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Although Yin, Merriam, and Stake situate case study from a constructivist epistemology, they have different theoretical understandings of how to approach a case study.

Yin (2003) writes that a case study is an all-encompassing empirical study with a logical design and specific data collection and analysis techniques. Yin views case study from a positivistic approach, where information is gathered from a detailed and structured design (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2003). Yin describes three different types of case studies: exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. Exploratory case studies explore situations where the phenomenon has a set outcome. Descriptive case studies describe the phenomenon in its context. Explanatory case studies seek to answer questions that connect program implementation with interventions. Yin states that a case study can include both qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to present a thorough and meaningful examination of the case.

Merriam (1998) views case study as an intensive description of a phenomenon of an individual, group, or community. A case study designed is open to multiple perspectives and approaches of a phenomenon. The case is a bounded system where researchers focus on one phenomenon that can describe the case in depth (Merriam, 2002). This phenomenon that is under examination and analyzation is the focus of a case study. Similar to Merriam's perspective, Stake (1995) views case study from an interpretivist perspective, where multiple perspectives interpret the issue. Stake argues that a case study examines the multiple complexities of a single case within a context. A case study is a choice in what is studied and by whatever appropriate methods chosen to examine the case (Stake, 2003; Starman, 2013). The flexible design of this type of case study allows the researcher to make changes even after the start of data collection; however,

the issue and questions remain consistent and structured. The Stakian case study has four defining characteristics: holistic, empirical, interpretive, and empathetic (Yazan, 2015). The researcher recognizes how the phenomenon is interrelated to the contexts (holistic), situates the study based on their examinations of the field (empirical), views research as the interactions between the researcher and subject (interpretive), and reflects on the experiences as an emic of the subject (empathic). Stake describes three types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. An intrinsic case study is based on the researcher's interest in a subject or issue while an instrumental case study allows the researcher to learn about a phenomenon or situation. A collective case study views more multiple cases in one study.

This case study design employed the Stakian approach from both intrinsic and instrumental perspectives. With prior experiences in implementing a literacy curriculum with an “evidence-based” label, I had an intrinsic interest in the presence and relationships between the commonplaces in the curriculum and if there were any opportunities for teachers to make instructional decisions to support literacy learning for their learners. My prior experiences with participating with a small selection of teachers who engaged in curriculum writing district level privileged me with the opportunity to gain insight of the process of curriculum development, decision-making, and implementation in high-needs schools. However, my experiences warranted my interest in examining curriculum adoption and implementation in high-needs schools. This case study provided documents with explanations from elementary teachers with experiences with curriculum implementation. This type of case study permitted me to gain insight into how literacy curriculum implementation is situated within the context of high-needs elementary

schools. In addition, an intrinsic case study opened opportunities to examining the comprehensiveness of literacy curriculum and instructional decision-making from a Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction lens based on the examination of the documents used in this research study.

Stake's flexible approach to data collection aligned with my interpretivist views of incorporating a variety of sources to describe a teacher's experiences with implementing a literacy curriculum with an "evidence-based" label. Schwab's Four Commonplaces and Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction served as frameworks to understanding how curriculum adoption and implementation provided opportunities for teachers to make decisions that supported literacy learning for their learners. The case in this study was a literacy curriculum with an "evidence-based" label that has been adopted and implemented in high-needs elementary schools to improve reading achievement. The incorporation of Schwab's Four Commonplaces to curriculum examination and Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction to teacher instructional decision-making bound this study to examine the inclusion and interrelated qualities of a literacy curriculum that are important to teaching literacy to culturally diverse learners in high-needs schools.

**Context of Study: "50 Years of Success. One Powerful Curriculum. A Lifetime of Literacy."**

The entity of a case has multiple contexts that operates in its own history (Stake, 2003). *Open Court Reading*, created by McGraw-Hill Education, is K-6<sup>th</sup> literacy curriculum that describes it teaches reading, writing, and language arts skills to young learners so they can become independent readers (McGraw-Hill Education, 2020). The curriculum's mission is to equip students with strong literacy foundational skills needed to become lifelong learners of literacy. The publishers of *Open Court Reading* argue this curriculum is evidenced-based based on a half century of research proving its effectiveness of using an explicit and systematic instructional model

to prepare lifelong learners of reading. According to the publishers, *Open Court Reading* is designed to ease the challenge of one of life's most difficult tasks, reading, for both teachers and learners in elementary schools (McGraw-Hill Education, 2020).

Vaden-Kiernan and associates (2018) explain that *Open Court Reading* incorporates instructional strategies to support learning in phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. The curriculum includes a variety of educational resources, including student materials and texts, teacher manuals, formative and summative assessments, and online educational resources. Across grade-levels, the curriculum has a structured three-part lesson format with instruction for teaching the five elements of literacy and skills in writing development.

District leaders, school administration, and teachers in the documents represented a wide range of schools serving diverse groups of learners. The stakeholders represented urban, suburban, and rural schools with many of the schools projecting low-performing ratings in literacy and one district with a history of high-performing ratings in literacy. Over half of the representation of elementary schools described the presence low reading achievement before the adoption of the curriculum. In addition, the teachers in the documents described a range of teaching experiences in Kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms; however, most of the teachers represented first grade and one teacher represented second grade in the documents and videos. The publishers of *Open Court Reading* interviewed teachers who implemented the curriculum in their classrooms; their lived experiences were represented in oral form in the videos and written form in the Case studies using quotation marks.



I chose to examine *Open Court Reading* in order to examine the presence and relationships between the six areas of literacy (phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing), the teacher, the learner, and the learning context because for three reasons: recommendation of effectiveness at the federal level, recommendation at the state level, and current usage in high-needs elementary schools. *Open Court Reading* received a potentially positive effective rating on general reading skills and comprehension skills for learners in high-needs elementary schools (What Works Clearinghouse, 2012). WWC identified the research evidence as small for both general reading skills and comprehension skills, but still determined that Open Court Reading has potentially positive effect for beginning readers. The publishers of Open Court Reading used the data from the WWC report to prove its program is evidence-based and effective in reading development in high-needs elementary schools. A southwestern state department of education listed *Open Court Reading* with a corpus of recommended evidence-based literacy curricula for elementary schools to adopt and implement to improve reading achievement (Georgia Department of Education, 2019). Importantly, high-needs elementary schools continue to adopt and implement *Open Court Reading* to improve reading achievement amongst their culturally diverse learners.

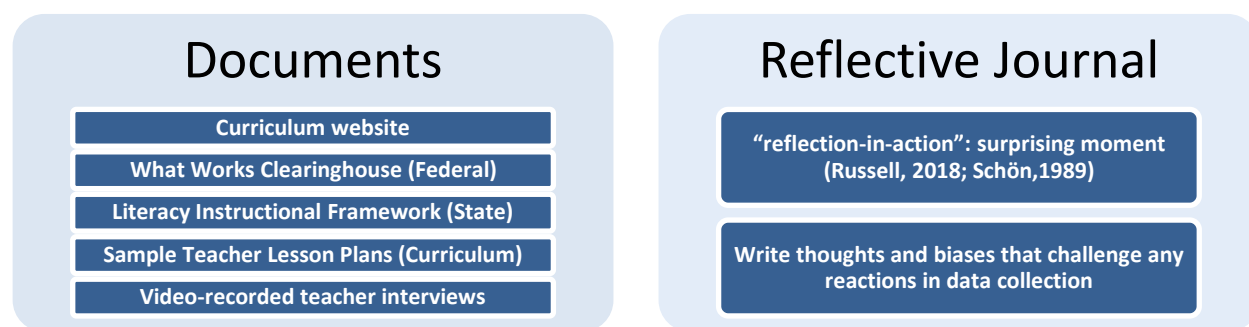
### **Data Collection**

The Stakian perspective to a case study design proposed the use of multiple sources to gather data on the events in question (Yazan, 2015). Documents are one of the major data sources in case study research and have clues and insight to an issue or phenomenon (Merriam, 2002). Bowen (2009) explained that documents are readily accessible in the public domain, provide coverage over a span of time, events, and settings, and useful for repeated reviews. This study selected multiple promotional materials from *Open Court Reading*'s website (see Figure 5

below), including program descriptions from the curriculum’s website, research findings and descriptions from the publisher’ website and What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) website, the state literacy instructional framework from the state department of education, sample teacher lessons from the online curriculum platform, and video-recorded teacher interviews from the website and Youtube.com. These documents were chosen to analyze and answer my research questions about the presence and relationships between the six areas of literacy, the teacher, the learner, and the learning context in one literacy curriculum with an “evidence-based” label (Vogt, Gardner, & Haeffele, 2012). Each data source is described in the next section.

**Figure 5**

*List of Data Sources*



**Documents.** There are various ways that documents are used in research: information on the research context, questions to ask or situations to observe, additional knowledge base, tracking and development, and to confirm findings from other sources (Bowen, 2009). This study used documents as the corpus of data sources to gain insight about descriptions of the common-places in the literacy curriculum and acquire information about teachers’ experiences with curriculum implementation in their classrooms. This study obtained a total of 16 data sources that became 20 documents from multiple public websites. The Kindergarten through third-grade sample units was split into two separate documents to review the unit introductions and the sample literacy lesson plan. This corpus of documents described in Table 2 were purposefully chosen

throughout the selection and analysis process because the information given targeted district and school leaders and teachers as future or current customers of *Open Court Reading* in order to improve reading achievement at the local high-needs elementary schools.

**Table 2**

*Data Sources Groups and Audiences*

Groups of Documents	Accessed From/Written By/Published By	Purpose	Audiences
1. Comprehensive Curriculum, Systematic Instruction, Differentiation, Open Court Meets ESSA Criteria, WWC Report	Open Court website WWC website	Description about curriculum and research to support effectiveness	Potential and Current District and School Customers
2. Case Study 1, Case Study 2, Case Study 3	<i>Open Court Reading</i> website	Describe teachers' experiences and beliefs about curriculum effectiveness	Potential and Current District and School Customers, Teachers
3. Intro to Grade K, Intro to Grade 1, Intro to Grade 2, Intro to Grade 3, Marysville Public Schools (video), Bradley County Schools (video), Decatur City Schools (video), ELA Instructional Framework	<i>Open Court Reading</i> website Youtube.com GA Department of Education website	Intros- Describe lesson layout  Videos- Describe teachers' experiences and beliefs about curriculum effectiveness  Framework- describe the layout of literacy block	Potential and Current District and School Customers, Teachers
4. Kindergarten Lesson Plan, First Grade Lesson Plan, Second Grade Lesson Plan, Third Grade Lesson Plan	<i>Open Court Reading</i> website	Describe the content areas and instructional strategies used in lessons	Teachers

I began the search for information about *Open Court Reading* with the publisher's website, The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) website, and the state department of education. The websites provided most documents, including the research reports, descriptions of the curriculum, sample literacy units for teachers, and the case studies describing teachers' experience with curriculum implementation. Additionally, I acquired one teacher interview from the publisher's website which led to finding two more teacher interviews about the curriculum on Youtube.com. The teacher interviews were typed into a Word document to be included as one of the data sources. I read each website and document and saved/printed any information that described the role of the literacy elements, teacher, learner, and learning context. For the pdf. documents, I saved or printed those documents from the websites and placed them in a specific data folder. I watched the videos two to three times to transcribe the words of the interviewees into a document for analyzation. All other documents were saved into a virtual folder labeled as Open Court Documents.

All 20 documents were valuable in understanding the how different stakeholders described the six areas of literacy, the teacher, the learner, and the learning context. I searched for information about the literacy curriculum from the Case Studies on the publisher's website, teacher interviews on YouTube, and teacher's literacy lesson plans from the online teacher's manual for grades Kindergarten-third grade on the publisher's website. These documents were valuable in understanding the lived experiences of curriculum implementation in elementary classrooms.

**Researcher reflective journal.** A reflective journal was used to document any personal assumptions or preconceived notions I had about the data collected after analyzing the documents (See Appendix A). Schön (1989) describes reflectivity as "reflection-in-action," where an

individual not only thinks about action, but think about action while doing the action. Reflection-in-action occurs when a moment is surprising or unexpected to an individual (Russell, 2018).

The reflective process required the process of examining personal “beliefs and experiences and how they connect to our theories-in-use” (Farrell, 2012, p. 12). After writing the analytic memo, I wrote any personal thoughts, ideas, and biases about the data collection and data analysis processes to challenge any personal reactions about the data and prompt future actions in the data collection process. All entries were dated based on the date of the analytic memo (e.g., Entry May 27; Entry October 8th). During data analysis, the reflective journal served to record any thoughts and ideas about the summary in my analytic memos, choices and need for specific documents to review to gather information, and my overall perceptions about the information presented about literacy, curriculum, and instruction. This journal served as a resource to purposefully choose and make changes to the data sources needed to examine the presence and relationships between the six areas of literacy, the teacher, the learner, and the learning context (Stake, 1995).

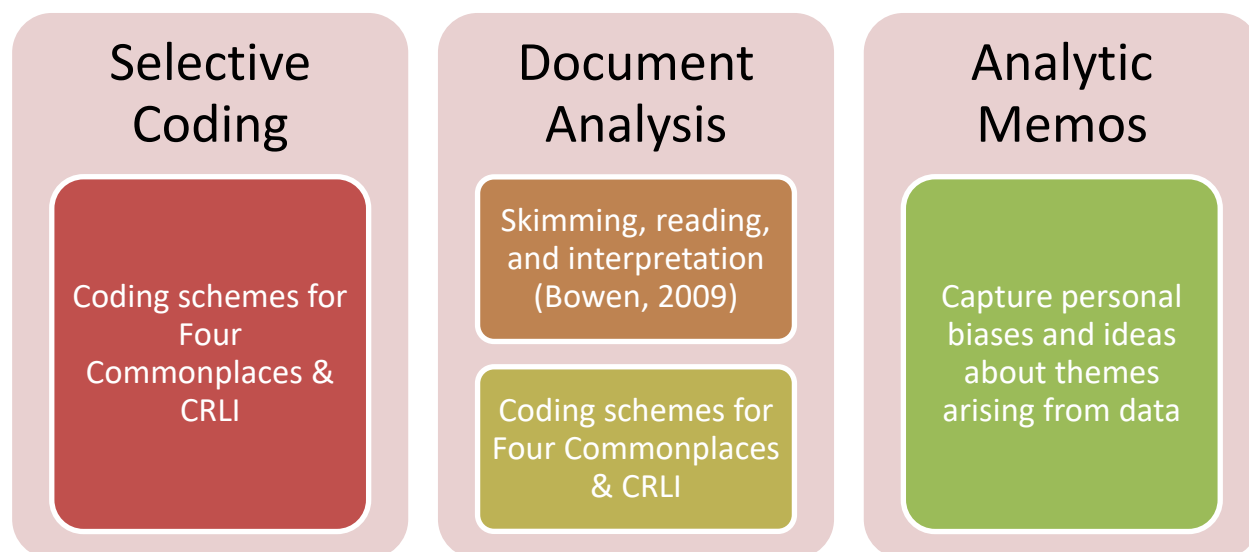
### **Data Analysis**

Dyson and Genishi (2005) describe analysis in literacy research as the process of creating an analytic quilt, where multiple examples are analyzed, and common threads come together. Analysis in literacy research keeps the researcher on “the trail of thematic threads, meaningful events, and powerful factors” that opens up a world of “multiple realities and dynamic processes” within the educational site (p. 111). I positioned myself for unexpected ideas and beliefs from multiple interpretations of literacy curriculum and instructional decision-making. Ulti-

mately, the goal of analysis in this case study research was to create a logical and consistent narrative of one literacy curriculum. Two forms of data analysis were used in this study: document analysis and selective coding (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6**

*List of Data Analyses*



**Document analysis.** Document analysis is a systematic procedure used to reviewing documents (Bowen, 2009). Bowen, in citing Corbin & Strauss (2008), explains that document analysis requires researchers to look over and interpret data in order to gather meaning, understanding, and gain knowledge. Researchers collect a variety of documents, including both print and electronic material, to gather knowledge and evaluate data. In the case of this study, online and printed materials were among the corpus of documents on literacy curriculum. Bowen shares that the analysis entails “finding, selecting, appraising (making sense of), and synthesizing data contained in documents” (p. 28). There are various ways that documents could be used in research: gather information on the research context, formulate questions to ask or specific situations to observe, acquire an additional knowledge base, track changes and development, and to confirm findings from other sources. Bowen explains that document analysis includes skimming (quick

overview), reading (thorough reading), and interpretation. In addition, this analysis includes determining the comprehensiveness (complete covering of a topic) or selectiveness (partial or limited covering of a topic) in a document (p. 33).

### **Document analysis groups.**

**Table 3**

#### *Document Analysis Groups and Rationale*

Groups of Documents	Rationale of Analysis
Comprehensive Curriculum, Systematic Instruction, Differentiation, Open Court Meets ESSA Criteria, WWC Report	Background information about curriculum and research findings
Case Study 1, Case Study 2, Case Study 3	Descriptions of teachers' lived experiences of curriculum implementation
Intro to Grade K, Intro to Grade 1, Intro to Grade 2, Intro to Grade 3, Marysville Public Schools, Bradley County Schools, Decatur City Schools, ELA Instructional Framework	In-depth descriptions of literacy block and additional descriptions of teachers' lived experiences
Kindergarten Lesson Plan, First Grade Lesson Plan, Second Grade Lesson Plan, Third Grade Lesson Plan	In-depth description of curriculum implementation and daily instructional layout

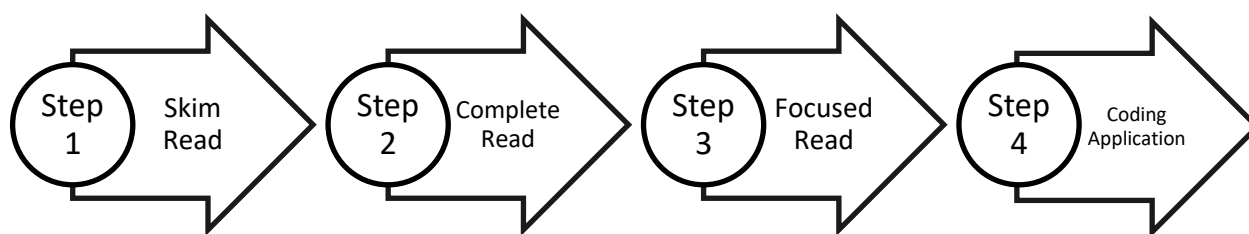
Table 3 shows the rationale of analyzing the four groups of documents over the course of six months. The first group of documents were mainly from the publisher's website to provide background information about the curriculum. The second group of documents were case studies of teachers' lived experiences of implementing the curriculum. The second group was analyzed to understand classroom experiences that were not described in the previous group of documents. The third group of documents were the introductions of the Teacher's Editions for grades Kin-

dergarten through Third grades, the state ELA instructional framework, and the teacher interviews on YouTube. These documents were analyzed for more in-depth descriptions about the literacy block and lived experiences of curriculum implementation that were limited or not available in first two groups of documents. The four group of documents were the Kindergarten through third grade sample lesson plans. These lesson plans were grouped to support descriptions about curriculum implementation described by teachers in the case studies and videos.

Each document was treated as a unique data source and analysis was conducted completely for one document before moving to the next. Figure 7 shows the four steps used when analyzing documents: step 1- skim read, step 2- complete read, step 3- focused read, and step 4- coding application.

**Figure 7**

*Four-Step Process of Document Analysis*



*Note.* This figure shows the four steps used when analyzing documents.

Before analysis, I previewed the document by skimming the titles and subheadings to get an overview of the information. Then, I read each document in its entirety, including the words, images, and pictures. As I read, I underlined words or phrases that related to the six areas of literacy, the teacher, the learner, the learning context for each document. Next, I focused on the



words or phrases underlined to capture the beliefs and ideas about the commonplaces. Last, I applied the coding scheme from Schwab's Four Commonplaces to identify commonplace categories labeled as SM for subject matter/literacy elements, M for milieu/learning context, T for teacher, and L for learner within each document. After analyzing a group of documents, I did a second round of analysis to starting with step 2. This round, I would identify words and phrases that capture the beliefs and ideas about the relationships between the commonplaces. Here, I identified how each document described the relationships between the teacher and learner, the subject matter, teacher and learner, and the learning context, teacher, and learner (see Appendix C). This analysis cycle occurred for document groups 2-4.

All codes identified were upload into NVivo and grouped under the commonplaces. After identification of the commonplaces, Next, I reviewed the codes to identify meaning ascribed to each commonplace across the documents. For example, all codes of T (for teacher) and codes for SM (subject matter or areas of literacy) were selected and meaning ascribed to them across a document. I wrote notes on patterns that existed across documents that described the four commonplaces (research question 1) and patterns that occurred related to relationships that existed between the commonplaces in the literacy curriculum (research question 2). Moreover, I synthesized this information for each document through an analytic memo. This same document analysis procedure was applied to all data sources.

**Selective coding.** Elliott (2018) writes, "Researchers code to get to grips with our data; to understand it, to spend it with it, and ultimately to render it into something we can report" (p. 2851). Using the coding schemes, I found and selected examples of the subject matter/literacy elements (SM), teacher (T), learner (L), and milieu/learning context (M) (see Table 4 below).

**Table 4***Examples of Analysis and Coding for Each Commonplace*

Data Source	Excerpt	Annotation	Four Commonplaces Code
Case Study Two	“learned to read using Open Court Reading”	Personal experiences with curriculum	Teacher (T)
Differentiation (2020)	Workshop Time- (Small groups)	Instructional model	Learning Context (M)
State ELA Instructional Framework	Engages in note-taking strategies	Explicit Learning Behaviors	Learner (L)
Third Grade Lesson Plan	High-frequency words	Reading Fluency	Literacy Elements (SM)

The commonplaces coding scheme included definitions and key words (see Appendix B) used to identify the descriptions of the six areas of literacy, the teacher, the learner, and the learning context within and across the documents. These codes were grouped, meaning applied, and synthesized through analytic memos. The final step in the analysis was to combine patterns, develop themes, and create a narrative on the presence and relationships between the literacy elements, teacher, learner, and learning context within the literacy curriculum.

**Analytic memos.** I created analytic memos after analyzing each data source. 16 of the 20 data sources have one analytic memo showing two rounds of analysis. 4 data sources, the Introductions to Kindergarten, First Grade, Second Grade, and Third Grade, have an analytic memo showing one round of analysis because these documents only provided information about the context of learning. After each analysis, I wrote and typed analytic memos after each moment of

analyzation to continue to document any personal ideas, biases, or beliefs about any emerging themes that arose from the data. Table 4 shows an example from one analytic memo which provides the date, name of document, type of analysis, examples of data, annotation, commonplaces code, and my commentary after analysis (refer to Appendix C for a detailed analytic memo).

Document analysis along with selective coding, which aligned with my interpretivist framework and case study design, helped to illuminate valuable information about the inclusion and relationships between the commonplaces within *Open Court Reading*, a literacy curriculum with the “evidence-based” label from the publishing company.

**Table 5**

*Example of Analytic Memo Process*

Date	Data Source	Type of Analysis	Examples of Data	Annotation	Commonplaces Code
August 27th	State ELA Instructional Framework	Document Analysis with Selective Coding	Engages in note-taking strategies Engages in guided practice	Explicit Learning Behaviors	Learner (L)
Excerpt from Memo	Explicit learning behaviors are passive actions that students show based on teacher instruction throughout the Opening, Transition to Work, and Work sessions. Learners engage, ask, and participate in standards-based activities and discussions. The document describes how learners show preparedness for learning, demonstrate mastery of content-specific skills, and receive feedback.				

## Trustworthiness

Mullet (2018) writes that trustworthiness of an analysis is shown through triangulation across data sets (multiple documents). Triangulation, as a form of validity in qualitative research, compares different kinds of data to see if they confirm one another (Bapir, 2012). Stake (2003) explains that triangulation is a process of clarifying meaning of repeatable interpretation based on different perspectives of the phenomenon. This research study triangulated data collected from various websites and videos discussing curriculum adoption and curriculum implementation to confirm the accuracy of information. Moreover, triangulation allowed me to examine the credibility between the lived experiences shared in the videos, information descriptions on the websites, the state literacy instructional framework, and the sample teachers' editions. Ultimately, the multiple sources of data gave a thick and rich description on curriculum and literacy from different interpretations of one literacy curriculum (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2002).

The Four Commonplaces coding scheme was a dependable tool used to examine descriptions of each commonplace across all 20 documents. This coding scheme was used to ensure that I coded information using the same definitions and key words under each commonplace. I wrote in my researcher's reflective journal to record any personal feelings, thoughts, and biases while engaging with the documents. In acknowledging prior experiences as a teacher who taught literacy to diverse students in high-needs elementary schools, I used this reflective journal to explain any personal tensions that arose between while examining the descriptions on the presence and relationships between the commonplaces across the data sources used in this case (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). The reflective journal helped to check any personal biases that I have about the

adoption and implementation of a literacy curriculum with an “evidence-based” label and instructional decision-making for learners across elementary schools, especially in high-needs elementary schools. The analytic memos served as a dependable source to clearly record the data identified in each document and write my thoughts about the descriptions of the information giving across the document. Both the journal entries and memos were written in separate journals, then immediately typed, and saved in online folders entitled “Analyses and Memos” and “Researcher’s Journal” respectively to ensure all thoughts and ideas were clear and traceable.

This research study was designed to be transferable to other research studies that focus on evidence-based literacy curricula that are adopted in high-needs schools. This study provided a detailed description of the literacy curriculum with an “evidence-based” label and the reason for analysis, number and types of documents analyzed, the number of analysis rounds and what elements were analyzed for each round, and my researcher’s role as learner of the presence and relationships between the commonplaces.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

As a personal bias, I wanted more teachers to be purposefully included in the curriculum adoption and implementation process, especially teachers who served culturally diverse learners in high-needs elementary schools. I believed teachers serving in high-needs schools had content and curriculum knowledge about the specific needs of their learners and can make professional and sound decisions about the type of curriculum needed to support literacy instruction and learning in their classrooms. The initial design of this research study incorporated three semi-structured interviews that asked probing and clarifying questions to teachers about their experiences with curriculum adoption, curriculum implementation and instructional decision-making in one high-needs elementary school (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). However, due to on-going COVID-

19 restrictions, this research study was not able to conduct interviews that were crucial in describing teachers' perceptions of curriculum adoption, curriculum implementation, and instructional decision-making in high-needs elementary schools in the past school year. Instead, this research study focused on the presence and relationships between the four commonplaces which included descriptions of teachers with curriculum implementation experiences across multiple documents and videos that were published on public websites over the past ten years.

The publisher's website provided a plethora of case studies that described experiences of curriculum adoption and implementation across various elementary schools. However, this corpus of data sources was solely limited to documents that provided descriptions of curriculum implementation experiences of general education teachers' in their elementary schools. This study did not include documents that provided the lived experiences of teachers that exclusively serve students in other capacities in high-needs schools: students with disabilities (SWD), English Learners (ELs), Early Intervention Program (EIP), speech and language pathologists, psychologists, school counselor, and other personnel. The documents in this study described the experiences of stakeholders outside the classroom: school administration, literacy coaches, district & state department coordinators. These experiences were woven throughout the documents and videos but were not included directly in this study. However, I acknowledged that the knowledge and expertise of these teachers, support staff, administration, and other leaders could have influenced the position and descriptions of curriculum adoption and implementation revealed in this research study.

18 of the 20 data sources were documents retrieved from the publisher's website. The descriptions of the curriculum's mission and teachers' experiences with curriculum implementation were objective to the teaching and learning goals outlined in the curriculum. Although the three

videos were published on YouTube, one of the videos were published on the publisher's website to support the curriculum's effectiveness in teaching literacy to elementary learners. These documents provided a biased position about effectiveness of the curriculum in teaching literacy to elementary learners. The documents from the publisher's website were valuable in understanding the presence and relationships of each commonplace, but the other two documents provided their own ideas and beliefs about literacy, curriculum, and instruction. The What Works Clearinghouse report and the state ELA instructional framework had their own ideas about literacy, curriculum and instruction for learners served in elementary schools at a national and state level, respectively.

This research study focused on the examination of one literacy curriculum with an "evidence-based" label from the publishing company. Stake (2003) writes, "The purpose of a case report is not to represent the world, but to represent the case" (p. 156). I decided to focus on one literacy curriculum with an "evidence-based" label in order to reveal how the curriculum represents each commonplace. In alignment with my Stakian case study design, this research study revealed how an evidence-based curriculum represented important characteristics of literacy teaching and learning: the six elements of literacy, the teacher, the learner, and the learning context. The representation of these four characteristics showed how they related to one another within one literacy curriculum used for classroom implementation.

I acknowledge that this study could use other frameworks to examine literacy, curriculum, and instruction in high-needs schools. Yet, I decided that the best theoretical approach to answer my research questions were to use an interpretivist framework. An interpretivist framework, using Joseph Schwab's (1973) Four Commonplaces, supported how multiple data sources described the presence and relationships between the six literacy elements, the teacher, the

learner, and the learning context in one literacy curriculum with an “evidence-based” label.

While answering my research questions, I was able to see if there were any opportunities for teachers to employ Culturally Responsive Literacy Instructional practices during curriculum implementation. The next chapter will present the findings about the presence and relationships between the commonplaces and opportunities to incorporate CRLI practices in the literacy curriculum.



## 4 RESULTS

### Documentation Overview

Table 2 lists the documents used in analysis. These sources provided similar and different perceptions about the functions and the relationships amongst the literacy elements, teacher, learner, and learning context across grade levels within the curriculum. These documents described one, two, or all four commonplaces and one or more relationship between commonplaces. Some documents answered one and/or many beliefs and ideas about each of the commonplaces and how they intersect with one another. The documents that provided the richest data on each commonplace and the relationships between commonplaces are labeled as Main Sources and the documents that offered additional information (e.g., expansion of findings, patterns, examples) are labeled as Additional Sources. In Table 9, sources with an asterisk, indicate the document included in the Main Sources. Each section had a unique group of documents in the Main Sources and Additional Sources that describe the function and relationships between the commonplaces. The next section presents main findings about the function of each commonplace and the relationships between the commonplaces. This chapter concludes with cross-analysis and presentation of themes.

**Table 6***List of Documents & References to Four Commonplaces*

Source	Type of Source	Date	Pages or Minutes	Research Question	Literacy Elements	Teacher	Learner	Learning Context
Comprehensive Curriculum*	Document	2020	3	1, 2	*	*	*	*
Systematic Instruction*	Document	2020	5	1, 2	*	*		
Differentiation*	Document	2020	7	1, 2		*	*	*
Open Court Meets ESSA Criteria*	Document	2020	2	1, 2	*	*	*	
What Works Clearinghouse Report*	Document	2012	17	1, 2	*	*	*	*
Case Study 1	Document	2020	4	2				
Case Study 2	Document	2020	4	1, 2		x	x	
Case Study 3	Document	2020	4	1, 2		x	x	
Intro to Grade K	Document	2020	5	1				x
Intro to Grade 1	Document	2020	5	1				x
Intro to Grade 2	Document	2020	4	1				x
Intro to Grade 3	Document	2020	5	1				x
Marysville Public Schools	Video	2016	4:00	1, 2			x	
Bradley County Schools	Video	2018	3:53	1, 2		x		
Decatur City Schools	Video	2018	5:13	1, 2		x	x	
ELA Instructional Framework*	Document	2016	1	1	*	*	*	*
Kindergarten Lesson Plan	Document	2020	8	1, 2	x	x	x	x
First Grade Lesson Plan	Document	2020	20	1, 2	x	x	x	x
Second Grade Lesson Plan	Document	2020	16	1, 2	x	x	x	x

Third Grade Lesson Plan	Document	2020	18	1, 2	x	x	x	x
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*Note.* Notations by column indicate that the source provided information on that commonplace.

An asterisk notes the document served as a Main source.

**The literacy elements.** Overall, the documents analyzed represent the subject matter, or literacy, as literacy encompassing six areas: phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing. The documents described the literacy elements as the learning goals for learners in elementary classrooms. For this section, the Main Sources are the documents from the publisher’s website and the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) report. The sample lesson plans and the state ELA instructional framework served as Additional Sources to provide more in-depth descriptions about the six literacy elements.

The Main Sources mentioned the curriculum’s effectiveness in supporting learner progress and mastery in five areas of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, reading comprehension, and vocabulary. The documents explained how explicit and systematic instruction along with a spiraling curriculum model within the five literacy elements were introduced and taught within and across elementary grades. The *Open Court Meets ESSA Criteria* and WWC reports focused the curriculum’s influence on two of the five areas of reading: reading comprehension and vocabulary. The *Open Court* report emphasized WWC’s report findings to describe the curriculum’s partial effectiveness in teaching comprehension and vocabulary to learners in first through fifth grades. The *Open Court* report relied on from the WWC research findings as the measure of effectiveness to all five areas of reading taught in the curriculum. Although these sources emphasized phonics, phonemic awareness, reading fluency, reading comprehension, and vocabulary, there was a brief description of the inclusion of writing as an area of literacy emphasized in the curriculum.

Alongside the curriculum website and WWC report, the state instructional framework and samples lesson plans described literacy as encompassing all six areas of literacy. The state ELA instructional framework described the importance of teaching all six literacy elements; however, this document emphasized the types of instructional strategies to teach reading comprehension, writing, and vocabulary. The ELA framework described the importance of content-specific strategies, such as close reading, to build reading comprehension skills. Strategies around content writing, the writing process, and strategies to learn writing were mentioned to build writing skills. In addition, the document indicated teaching both academic and disciplinary skills to build vocabulary. The instructional framework mentioned other literacies, such as digital media literacy and collaborative conversations, that were important to teach across all six elements of literacy, too.

The Kindergarten lesson focused on four of the six literacy elements: combined phonemic awareness and phonological awareness, phonics: alphabetic principle, reading comprehension, and writing skills. This lesson focused on hearing sounds in words and rhyming words. The alphabetic principle lesson focused on naming and writing uppercase and lowercase letters. The print and book awareness lesson emphasized the identification of the parts of a book, which included the front and back covers and the title of the text. These skills were taught during the focus under the foundational skills and reading comprehension sections of the lesson plan. The comprehension skills focused on previewing texts and setting purposes for reading. The writing skills focused on the purpose of writing, brainstorming ideas in the writing process, and using writing tools such as a graphic organizer to write ideas. Overall, each literacy element focused on introducing basic foundational skills. The vocabulary skills were implicitly taught throughout the lesson plan. Each literacy element had terms to build background knowledge and actions on the

literacy skills. The words were not bolded or separated from the instruction description, but were woven into each short, descriptive paragraph in the lessons.

The first-grade lesson focused on all six literacy elements: phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing. The phonemic awareness lesson focused on blending and segmenting phonemes in words. The phonics lesson focused on sound-spelling identification and blending words and sentences. Reading fluency lessons focused on building high frequency words and word decoding in texts. Reading fluency included answering questions about words in the text. Reading comprehension and vocabulary were combined in this lesson plan. Reading comprehension focused on building multiple skills around one genre. The text was embedded in the lesson plan for teachers to review comprehension skills. Vocabulary words and definitions in the text were explicitly taught by teachers during comprehension and writing sections in the lesson plan. The Writing section focused on the writing structure and revisions of one topic in Narrative writing. In addition, penmanship skills were reviewed during the writing lesson.

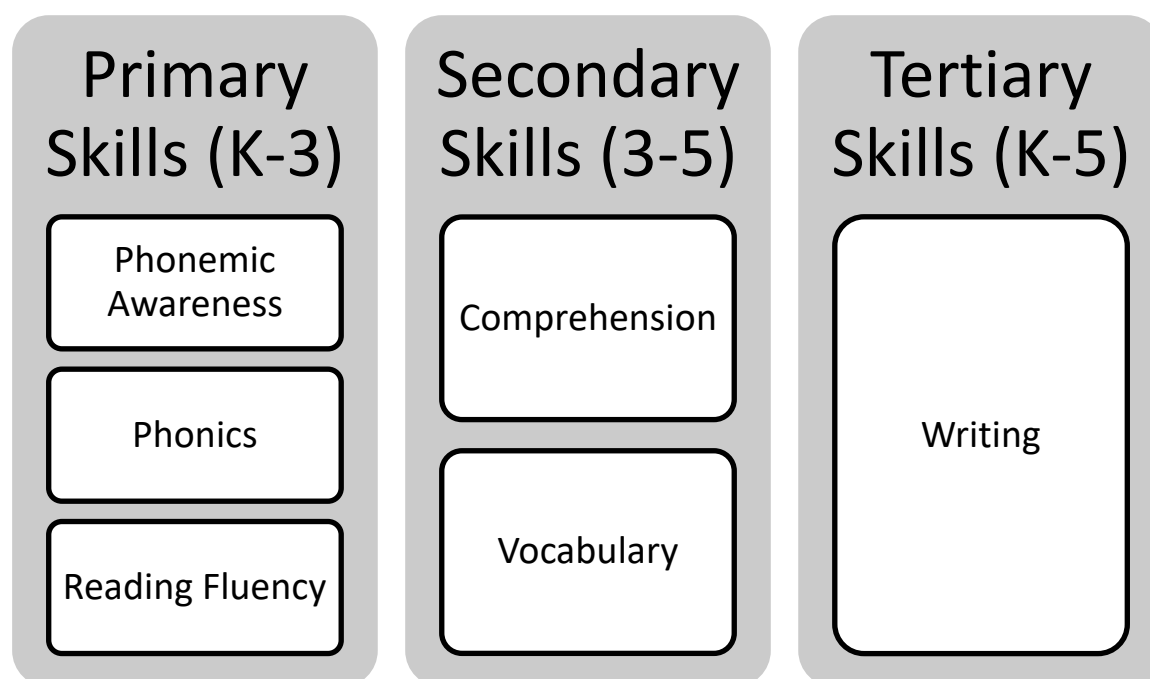
The second-grade lesson plan focused on five of the six literacy elements: phonics, reading fluency, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing. This lesson plan had a huge emphasis on comprehension skills, vocabulary, and reading fluency in comparison to the other literacy areas. The phonics lesson reviewed digraphs in words. The fluency lessons focused on increasing learner accuracy and rate of reading passages and decodable texts. The comprehension lesson focused on multiple strategies and genres of reading. The vocabulary lesson focused on building background of types of genres, word relating to the unit's theme, and writing strategies. The writing lesson focused on Opinion Writing and spelling words.

The third-grade lesson plan focused on five of the six literacy elements: phonics, reading fluency, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing. This lesson plan integrated literacy skills across the literacy elements. For example, reading fluency skills were presented during the foundational skills and the comprehension skills lessons. Reading comprehension skills were reviewed during fluency practice. Vocabulary development was reviewed during decoding and comprehension lessons. Writing practice was applied during phonics review. Overall, the lesson plan emphasized fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary skills in comparison to phonics and writing skills.

The above documents emphasized the presence of all six areas of literacy in a literacy program. However, I found that the six areas of literacy had a tiered presence across grade levels. Foundational skills had more precedence in lower elementary grades and comprehension and vocabulary skills have more precedence in upper elementary grades. Overall, the Main Sources explained that lifelong literacy was attributed to strong foundational skills combined with comprehension and writing. Similarly, the Additional Sources indicated there is an emphasis of teaching and learning phonemic awareness, phonics, and reading fluency in K-2 grades in comparison to comprehension, vocabulary, and writing in 3-5 grades. However, the importance of the literacy skills was described as skills taught to “learn to read” in lower elementary grades and skills taught to “read to learn” in upper elementary grades, as illustrated in Figure 8.

**Figure 8**

*List of Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary skills*



The instructional design of the curriculum primarily focused on skills in phonemic awareness, phonics, and reading fluency. The layout of the design had three sections: Foundational Skills, Reading and Responding, and Language Arts. The Foundational Skills began the literacy instructional day throughout most of the unit lessons. The skills that students learned in Kindergarten through third grades were print and book awareness, sounds and letters, decoding strategies such as sound-by-sound blending and multisyllabic blending, and increased accuracy and rate with decodable texts. The first-grade teachers in the case studies described an emphasis on phonics skills in the first-grade curriculum so students can “learn to read” in the lower elementary grades and be prepared to learn comprehension and vocabulary skills that help with “reading to learn” in the upper elementary grade levels. Writing was described as an ongoing skill that students acquired to respond to the skills across the five literacy elements in the curriculum. Both the Main Sources and Additional Sources, including teachers in the Case studies, mentioned

some emphasis on explicit and systematic writing instruction across the curriculum. Across the lesson plans, there were writing lessons that introduced different genres of writing, writing structure, the writing process, and spellings tests. One first-grade teacher described how the curriculum introduced different genres of writing throughout the curriculum.

“I love that Language Arts here jumps around and do different types of writing.”

In summary, document analysis revealed the function of the subject matter was to emphasize all six literacy elements in the curriculum. However, I found that the documents indicated the importance of phonemic awareness, phonics, and reading fluency in lower elementary grades, reading comprehension and vocabulary in upper elementary grades, and writing skills across grade levels. The three content areas taught in lower elementary grades had a greater emphasis in the curriculum in comparison to the other three content areas. Additionally, writing development and skills had the least amount of emphasis across the curriculum. Schwab explained that the subject matter should include the content knowledge and the educational materials that support the content. The findings from analyzation of the documents described the content focus of the six areas of literacy for both lower and upper elementary grades. The descriptions of the areas of literacy included learning objectives and literacy-specific skills indicated within each literacy element, too. In using Schwab’s framework, the educational resources and activities aligned with content knowledge and skills across the six areas of literacy that were targeted in the curriculum.

In analyzing the presence of the six areas of literacy through the lens of Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction (CRLI), the findings showed that the focus on learning content knowledge and skills using the educational resources provided in the curriculum appear to limit the opportunities to incorporate educational resources and materials used to build knowledge in phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing.



The curriculum did not provide examples of topics or ideas for lessons that value the incorporation of culture and literacy in real-world situations and experiences. The next section has outlined descriptions of the learning context.

**Learning context.** Whole group instruction and small group instruction created the teaching and learning dynamic during the literacy block in this curriculum. Whole group instruction was the main pathway to explicitly introduce literacy skills while small group instruction was the pathway to reteaching and reviewing literacy skills. The Main Sources that described the learning context were the documents on the publisher's website, WWC report, ELA instructional framework and the unit introductions in the Teacher's Edition while the Additional Sources were the lesson plans.

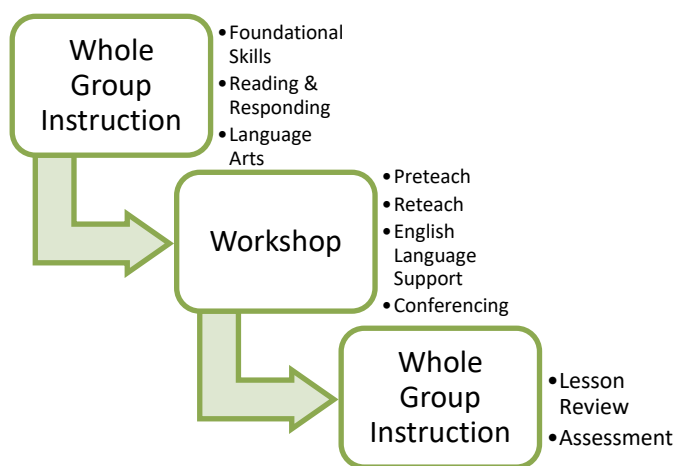
The Main Sources described that classroom context was built around scheduled instructional time and specific types of instructional delivery that prepare learners for lifelong literacy. The WWC document explained that the recommended instructional time for *Open Court Reading* literacy block is two and a half hours for lower elementary grades and two hours for upper elementary grades. However, the teachers were observed allocating only 90 minutes of literacy instruction in their classrooms, as described by the report. The state instructional framework recommended percentages of time for each section of the daily literacy block. The Opening section was 20 percent of the lesson, the Transition to Work section was 5 percent of the lesson, the Work section was 55 percent of the lesson, the Closing was 20 percent of the lesson. Specifically, the state ELA instructional framework had the same chart indicating recommended instructional times but did not have the exact percentages. The ELA instructional framework explained the percentages of time could shift depending on amount of instructional time needed to

teach a literacy skill across the literacy elements each during the literacy block. Within the allotted instructional time, teachers used the literacy lessons to implement whole group instruction, Workshop (combination of whole group, small group, and individualized instruction), and multiple assessments.

The group of Additional Sources described the combination of explicit instruction and systematic lessons to teach and learn skills across the literacy elements. The unit introductions and lesson plans for grades Kindergarten through third grades indicated a systematic layout of the lessons that include explicit descriptions about instructional delivery. Each grade level unit introduction included the same or similar descriptions about the layout of the literacy instructional block. Figure 9 shows the lesson format for whole group instruction and small group instruction during Workshop time (McGraw-Hill Education, 2020).

**Figure 9**

*Instructional Framework during Literacy Block*



*Note.* This is the instructional layout for literacy as described in the curriculum.

The descriptions about whole group instruction were the same in the introduction sections for Kindergarten, first-grade, second-grade, and third-grade units. The lesson plans followed the same format: Foundational skills first, Reading and Responding second, and Language Arts last.

The Foundational skills decreased as the Reading and Responding lesson increased from Kindergarten to third-grade. In the Kindergarten and first grade units, the Foundational skills sections was longer than the other two sections in the second-grade and third-grade units. This section was much of the whole group lesson. In contrast, the Reading and Responding section was longer in the second-grade and third-grade lessons than the lessons in the Kindergarten and first-grade units. This section was much of the whole group lesson. The first-grade units had a systematic description of the progression with modeling reading skills during whole group instruction. As described in the unit, teachers did most of the modeling at the beginning of the year and learners took on modeling skills by the end of the year to encourage independent reading. This progression of reading skills in the first-grade unit created the expectation for teachers to ensure learners are reading fluently by the end of the year.

The description of Workshop gave a flexible option for implementation based on scheduling and the needs of learners. Teachers had the flexibility in the time of implementation. In addition, teachers could have Workshop before the lesson, after each part of the lesson, or after the lessons. Teachers could have blocks of Workshop, where teachers could implement one set time or have Morning/Afternoon block for small group instruction. Although there was flexibility in time, objectives, and implementation across lower elementary grades, the Kindergarten introduction section highly encouraged teachers to have a Workshop daily to begin to mold independent learners in small group. Overall, the Workshop section was a required element of the literacy block for grades Kindergarten through third grades.

The Assessment administration was a systematic process throughout the curriculum, too. The curriculum units described the specific times in the academic year for assessment administration. All Kindergarten through third grade units began with a Diagnostic assessment at the

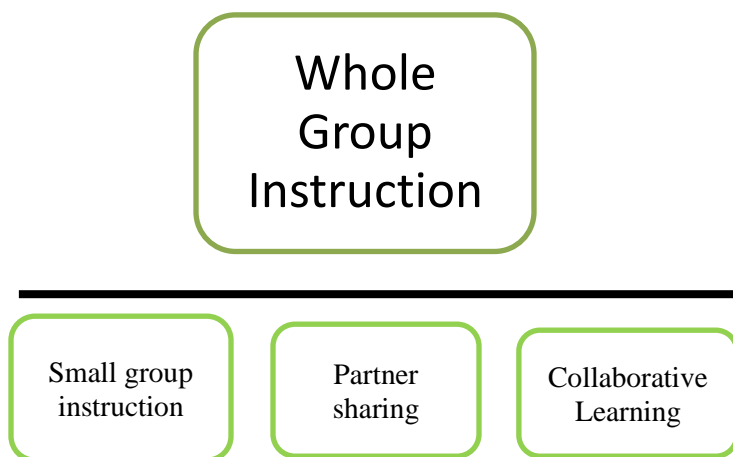
beginning of the year to screen for learners at-risk for reading failure. Next, teachers administered Lesson Assessments and progress monitoring assessments to monitor progress weekly, monthly, or as needed throughout the unit. Last, teachers administered Unit and Benchmark assessments to assess learners' understanding and measure outcomes of teacher instruction. This systematic assessment process was identical throughout the unit introductions for Kindergarten to third grades.

The lessons plans emphasized two types of instructional models: whole group instruction and small group instruction. As described in the unit introductions, the lesson plans went into detail about the literacy skills, teaching strategies, and learner tasks in the sections of Foundational Skills, Reading and Responding, and Language Arts. Workshop time provided the opportunity for teachers to reteach and review skills while learners practiced and applied skills in all the lesson plans. The lesson plans described collaborative learning between learners in small groups and partners; however, the third-grade lesson plan emphasized partner sharing as an opportunity for teaching and learning amongst peers. Partner sharing allowed learners to work together to review and practice reading fluency and writing development, and spelling accuracy. Learners were collaborating with one another to practice fluency skills and writing skills and provide feedback on peers' work.

The lesson plans described formative and summative assessments within each lesson. Most of the formative assessments, like asking questions, were embedded in the lessons while rubrics were additional resources included in the curriculum. Also, summative assessments, like the writing and comprehension rubrics, were additional resources included in the curriculum. The Kindergarten lesson plan mostly had teachers asking questions and using observations throughout each section. The first-grade lesson plan provided two types of assessments using the

same type of tool: informal and summative assessments with rubrics. Both formative and summative assessments used curriculum-created rubrics to monitor and evaluate student learning, respectively. The second-grade lesson plan described what and when to administer both formative and summative assessments. The Comprehension strategy rubric and questions about decoding, comprehension skills, and vocabulary were given throughout the lesson to check for understanding. The Writing rubric was used to evaluate students' complete writing piece. In addition, this lesson plan explicitly detailed the name and timing to administer these assessments. Throughout the lesson plan, teachers were prompted to ask questions throughout the lessons to check for understanding. The third-grade lesson plan described the formative assessments tools, such as Speaking and Listening rubrics and Sentence Starters, to assess and check for understanding and application of literacy skills. The Writing rubrics and the Spelling assessments, as summative assessments, evaluated writing structure and spelling accuracy, respectively.

Although the documents from the publishers' website and lesson plans from the teachers' manuals described the implementation of whole group instruction and small group instruction, I found a precedence of whole group instruction over other instructional models implemented during the literacy block. Both the Main Sources and the Additional Sources described the implementation of whole group instruction during the literacy block across elementary grades.

**Figure 10***Preferred Instructional Model*

Whole group instruction was the primary instructional model emphasized to implement direct and explicit instructional strategies throughout the lessons and the literacy block. Whole group instruction occurred at the beginning and the end of each lesson with the teacher using the lessons to teach literacy skills across the six areas of literacy. The documents from the website and the lesson plans administered assessments during whole group instruction, too. Although the lesson plans implemented other instructional models such as small group instruction and collaborative learning, these instructional models were secondary to whole group instruction during the literacy block.

Overall, document analysis described the function of the learning context was to create a teaching and learning dynamic containing the implementing of whole group instruction and small group instruction during the literacy block in elementary grades. Even with opportunities

for flexibility in instructional times and teaching specific skills, both whole and small group instructional models were the main pathways to explicit teaching and learning in the curriculum. According to Schwab, the instructional models and instructional times are important characteristics to a child's learning in the classroom. However, the findings showed that the learning context maintained traditional notions with teacher-led instructional formats (e.g., whole group to teach; small group to reteach), and emphasis on whole group instruction throughout the literacy block and lesson. Based on the documents, the learning context did not represent a CRLI understanding of relevant learning contexts inside and outside the classroom, including an emphasis of collaborative learning in the classroom, the role of school culture, learners' lived experiences with literacy learning, and family and community dynamics that indicate the kinds of spaces that create opportunities for literacy learning and application in real-world situations. The findings did show that there were multiple opportunities to implement the multiple assessments and feedback provided by the curriculum, but there were no descriptions of creating opportunities to include various types of assessments and feedback that reflect learners' cultural backgrounds and learning styles. While these characteristics are important to the learning context, so are those associated with the role of the teacher, which is present in the next section.

**Teacher.** The teacher implements the lessons using an explicit teaching model to teach skills across the literacy elements. The Main Sources included documents on the publisher's website, WWC report, and state ELA instructional framework while the Additional Sources were the Case Studies, videos, and lesson plans. The Main Sources described the teacher's role as the implementor of the instructional model and literacy lessons to ensure learner success across the six literacy elements. Specifically, the publisher's website described how the curriculum has Foundational Kits that contain the Literacy Scope and Sequence, the Common Core Standards

State Standards (CCSS) Correlation, Literature List, and the Kit Resources to support teaching and lesson implementation. The literacy scope and sequence outlined specifically when to teach the skills learned within each literacy element across the elementary grade levels. The CCSS correlation outlined the connection between the state literacy standards along with the exact pages in the units where teachers can locate where it is introduced and retaught in the curriculum. The Literature List explicitly described the phonemes taught in each unit and the decodable texts that teachers use to introduce each sound. Teachers had a picture of the focus skills that are introduced and reinforced in their grade level. Moreover, teachers knew what skills students were taught in prior grade levels and what skills will be taught in future grade levels. Based on these descriptions, teachers had a detailed roadmap to learning literacy in their grade level and across grade levels in the curriculum.

The Additional Sources indicated that teachers have a shared role of ensuring learners mastered literacy skills necessary to succeed in reading. The publisher's website boasted of over 50 years of success in literacy across the nation. With the years of learner progress, the success of *Open Court Reading* increased school-wide and district-wide "buy-in" for the adoption and implementation of the curriculum. One first grade teacher in the videos stated:

"Getting those test results is affirmation that it works, it is working."

Along with the years of success, teachers had varied experiences with the curriculum that influenced their beliefs about the curriculum's success in preparing literacy learners. Teachers explained that their prior and current experiences with learning and teaching literacy influenced their beliefs about the success of the curriculum so other colleagues were convinced about the school-wide or district-wide adoption. Some of the teachers described the connection between



personal experiences with reading success with the curriculum in their elementary school experiences:

“I grew up with *Open Court Reading* and I have always been an avid reader. I’m starting to see the connection.”

One teacher described the belief that the curriculum changed her teaching practice in literacy because she was “not trained in phonics and never taught phonics” in prior teaching experiences (McGraw-Hill Education, 2020, p. 3). The curriculum’s explicit and systematic instructional model molded the teacher’s belief about teaching literacy with fidelity. The teachers’ prior and current experiences with the curriculum as learners and teachers influenced their beliefs about teacher success with literacy success across elementary grades.

Both Main Sources and Additional Sources indicated that teachers mainly applied direct and explicit instructional strategies from the curriculum. Teachers implemented two types of instructional models to support learner mastery of foundational skills: whole group instruction through explicit and systematic instructional strategies and small group/individualized instruction through differentiation strategies. The documents from the publisher’s website described explicit instruction as instruction where teachers give direct and modeled explanations, so learners knew exactly what literacy skills they were learning. The instruction was systematic where learners built upon prior knowledge on simple and complex skills within and across the six elements of literacy.

“Phonemic awareness is phenomenal. Children need to be able to sound out a word, take the word apart, be able to listen to the middle sound. That is all included in *Open Court*.”

The authors of *Open Court Reading* report agreed that explicit and systematic instruction supported learner mastery of comprehension and vocabulary skills. If learners did not grasp skills

during explicit and systematic instruction, teachers differentiated instruction to support student mastery of literacy skills. Teachers retaught or extended concepts taught in previous literacy lessons, including literacy support for English Learners. These two different instructional models lead to teacher expectations for learner results in literacy skills across the literacy elements. Moreover, teachers from the case studies emphasized a shared expectation of learner mastery of literacy skills in lower elementary grades.

“We know without a doubt that by the end of first grade, our students will be able to read fluently”

“Teachers in the upper grades are thankful they can expect every student to enter their classrooms with foundational skills”

As a district-wide shared expectation, teachers from one of the videos strived for 90% of third graders to read on grade-level (McGraw-Hill Education, 2018). Lower elementary teachers implemented both explicit and systematic lessons along with differentiated strategies from the curriculum to show they have fulfilled the expectation of teaching literacy skills to the students in their classroom. The implementation of the curriculum’s instructional strategies and explicit lessons was evidence that teachers share a common teaching goal of preparing lifelong readers in their classrooms.

The Additional Sources described specific teaching strategies applied across the six literacy elements. The Kindergarten-third grade lesson plans identified Teacher tips to support preparation and instruction of the literacy objectives. These tips were located at the begin or during a lesson to help the flow and organization of teaching and learning. The Teacher tips helped teachers to notice learner behaviors while teaching the skills. In addition, it gave teacher the instructional strategies for reteaching skills to learners in whole group instruction. Teacher instruction

in third-grade lesson plans focused on providing direct instruction and review of literacy concepts. The Teacher tips in the lesson plan instructed teachers to tell, show, and point strategies to learners. Teacher Modeling had a huge emphasis on teaching comprehension skills. In the first-grade lesson plan, the modeling strategies were explicitly written in short paragraphs where teachers can read in verbatim from the beginning to the end of the text. The teacher modeled comprehension and writing techniques with all learners. The English Learner and Approaching Level strategies called for teachers to help and remind students of skills. The On Level and Beyond Level teacher strategies called for teachers to ask questions and discuss learners' thinking and reasoning. Overall, the second-grade instructional strategies called for teachers to remind and provide learners with content-specific information and modeling skills such as asking questions and active listening during student presentations. Throughout the lesson, teachers explicitly taught skills to students using the educational materials and resources in the curriculum. Moreover, teachers provided tasks for learners to complete at home with family members. This lesson plan did not specify if the home activities were returned for feedback or an assessment grade.

With the emphasis of teachers using explicit instruction from the lessons, I found that there were instructional practices that were emphasized more than other instructional practices. The Main Sources and Additional Sources mentioned teacher instructional practices to implement while teaching literacy in lower and upper elementary grades. The state ELA instructional framework and the lesson plans described two types of instructional practices that teachers should display in the lessons within the literacy block: Explicit Practices and Data-Driven Practices (see Figure 11).

**Figure 11***Explicit Instructional Practices and Data-Driven Instructional Practices*

Explicit Instructional Practices	Data-Driven Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce</li> <li>• Engage</li> <li>• Display</li> <li>• Review/Reteach</li> <li>• Provide/Tell/Point Out</li> <li>• Model</li> <li>• Ask</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Model</li> <li>• Scaffold</li> <li>• Review</li> <li>• Conference</li> <li>• Purposefully assign</li> <li>• Ask</li> <li>• Facilitate</li> <li>• Identify</li> <li>• Explain</li> </ul>

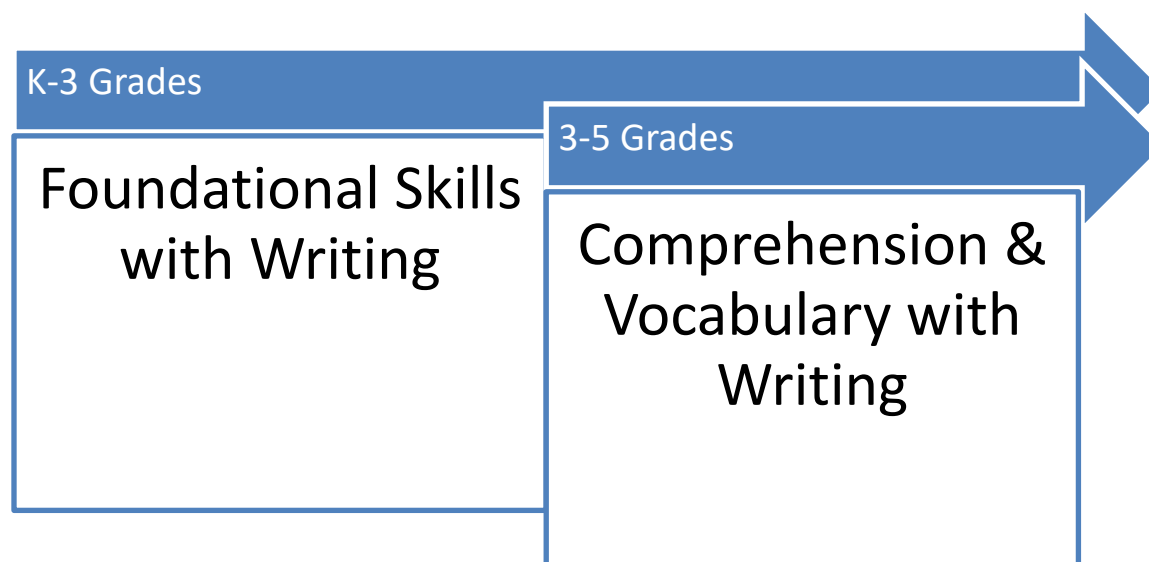
There were some action words that showed up repeatedly in the ELA instructional framework document to describe explicit instruction: introduce, provide, and engage. Teachers introduced standards, learning objectives, and educational tools that were written in the lesson plan to teach the literacy skill of focus. Teachers provided explicit instruction of content, small group instruction, guided student practice, and learner feedback. Specifically, there were few opportunities for teachers to engage with learners in standards-based discussions and making connections using prior knowledge taught in previous lessons. There were a variety of action words associated with data-driven teacher practices, including modeling, reviewing, asking, and conferencing. Teachers facilitated and purposefully assigned whole group, small group, and independent assignments. Teachers engaged in data-driven practices to monitor literacy learning and make instructional decisions to support literacy progress and mastery of learning objectives for learners.

Across the lesson plans, there were actions words that showed up repeatedly to describe Explicit Instructional Practices: display, provide/tell/point out, review, reteach, model, and ask. The teachers displayed educational materials and resources to support in building background knowledge and context for comprehension lessons. The lesson plans explicitly had teachers provide, tell, and point out skills across the literacy elements. Moreover, teachers were reminding and reteaching skills during and after whole group lessons. Modeling and asking questions showed up often as explicit instructional strategies in contrast to data-driven instructional strategies as described in the state ELA instructional framework. For example, the lesson plans described teacher modeling as an explicit strategy to explicitly demonstrate to learners how to apply literacy skills, especially in comprehension and writing lessons. The questions that teachers asked were mostly for information recall during fluency and comprehension lessons. Modeling and questioning were explicitly written and systematically placed throughout the lessons. There were little to no opportunities for teachers to implement data-driven instructional practices described across the lesson plans because each lesson was written explicitly for each skill of focus.

In summary, document analysis emphasized the function of teachers to implement an explicit and systematic model along with the literacy lessons to teach skills across the six literacy elements. Schwab explains that teachers should have knowledge of subject matter, instructional decisions, have relatability to students, teachers, and administration, and personal beliefs and feelings about themselves. Document analysis revealed teachers followed the layout of the lessons, explicit instructional strategies, and resources to teach literacy to learners. Teachers mostly displayed explicit teacher practices that aligned with the explicit instructional model throughout the lessons, too. However, the documents did not indicate if teachers' knowledge of literacy, pedagogies, self-efficacy, and autonomous feelings were important characteristics to curriculum

implementation. In looking at the findings from a CRLI lens, the descriptions of the teachers did not reveal if there were opportunities for teachers to decide which instructional models would support literacy learning for their learners. The descriptions of the teachers did not appear to provide opportunities for teachers to employ instructional strategies that values autonomy, choice, and freedom to support their learners. The following section presents the function of the fourth commonplace: the learner.

**Learner.** Learners were accountable with accessing and applying literacy skills within and across the literacy elements. The Main Sources included documents on the publisher's website, WWC report, and state ELA instructional framework while the group of Additional Sources were the Case Studies, videos, and lesson plans. The Main Sources described that all types of learners, including culturally, linguistically, and learning-diverse groups, were tasked with learning skills across the six literacy elements needed to prepare themselves as independent learners of a lifetime of literacy learning. The documents on the publisher's website and the state ELA instructional framework described the importance of diverse cultures and representations throughout the educational materials and resources used to teach literacy. Even with this emphasis of representation of diverse cultures and learning styles, learners with all ability levels were guaranteed a strong foundation in literacy skills with the implementation of the curriculum (McGraw-Hill Education, 2020). All learners were taught literacy skills through the same explicit and systematic instructional model as described in Figure 12.

**Figure 12***Progression of Literacy Learning for All Learners*

The documents on the publisher’s website described the importance of learners progressing across the six literacy elements within lower and upper elementary grades; however, the WWC report emphasized learner progression and mastery in comprehension and vocabulary skills. All learners progressed from phonemic awareness to phonics to morphology at the same pace according to the layout of the lesson in the curriculum. In addition, curriculum materials and resources introduced and reinforced literacy skills across the literacy elements to learners.

The Additional Sources explained how teachers described their learners based upon their progress in mastering literacy skills with the curriculum’s instructional pacing. Each learner was tasked with mastering phonemic awareness, phonics, and reading fluency in lower elementary grades so they are prepared to read texts that supported their progress in learning comprehension and vocabulary skills in upper elementary grades. Learners were described as strong readers and quick learners when making significant gains in mastering foundational skills or comprehension

skills; however, learners were slow readers when making little to no significant gains in mastering foundational skills according to the pacing in the curriculum. One teacher described her learners based upon access to literacy texts and resources in their homes. The teacher shared that her learners lack adequate access to decodable texts on their instructional level, so the curriculum supplemented this inaccessibility by providing texts that learners practiced reading fluency skills at home. The lesson plans identified four types of learners: English Learner, Approaching Level, On Level, and Beyond Level. These learner descriptions were associated with progress and mastery of learning objectives in the lessons. There were more strategies for English Learners and Approaching Level students in comparison to On Level and Beyond Level learners. The On Level and Beyond Level learners each had one task to complete throughout the entire lesson across the lesson plans.

I found that learners explicitly practiced and applied literacy skills during the literacy block. Both Main Sources and Additional Sources described that learners practiced literacy content using explicit learning skills. The one document in the group of Main Sources explained how learners accessed literacy content. The state ELA instructional framework described two types of learning behaviors that can be observed during the literacy block: Explicit Learning Behaviors and Reflective Learning Behaviors as listed below in Figure 13.



**Figure 13***Explicit Learning Behaviors and Reflective Learning Behaviors*

Explicit Learning Behaviors	Reflective Learning Behaviors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage</li> <li>• Participate</li> <li>• Prepare</li> <li>• Demonstrate</li> <li>• Receive</li> <li>• Say</li> <li>• Listen</li> <li>• Watch</li> <li>• Point</li> <li>• Repeat/Retell</li> <li>• Tell/Give/Name/Identify</li> <li>• Answer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask</li> <li>• Access</li> <li>• Investigate/Analyze</li> <li>• Conference</li> <li>• Share</li> <li>• Justify</li> <li>• Provide</li> <li>• Reflect</li> <li>• Illustrate</li> </ul>

Explicit learning behaviors were described as actions that learners demonstrate as a result of the teacher's explicit instruction throughout the Opening, Transition to Work, and Work sessions. Learners engaged, asked, and participated in standards-based activities and discussions. Learners displayed preparedness for learning, demonstrated mastery of content-specific skills, and received teacher feedback based on progress and mastery of literacy standards. The framework described a variety of actions that learners display as Reflective Learning Behaviors. Learners made connections, accessed prior knowledge, investigated and analyzed their own thinking, conferenced with teacher while justifying their work and reflecting on their progress toward mastery. Moreover, learners completed literacy-specific research and performance tasks while providing peer feedback and asking clarifying questions based on the learning objectives.

The access to and the application of Reflective Learning Behaviors were inequitable in the lower elementary grades in comparison to the upper elementary grades. Overall, the Additional Sources indicated that learners demonstrated more Explicit Learning Behaviors than Reflective Learning Behaviors. Across the lesson plans, the Kindergarten and first grade learners mostly practiced literacy skills using Explicit Learning Behaviors while second and third grade students practiced literacy skills using Explicit and Reflective Learning Behaviors. In Kindergarten lesson plans, learners used kinesthetic movement when displaying explicit learning behaviors throughout the lessons. Learners touched, bounced, pointed, and used motions to recall, repeat, and identify letters and letter sounds. The first-grade lesson plans described learners mostly using explicit learning behaviors to access literacy content. Learners used four of the five senses to demonstrate understanding of literacy skills. Learners listened, watched, spoke, and illustrated their responses; however, these learners were explicitly instructed to activate their senses at different sections of the lesson plan. Learners were repeating, retelling, giving, and naming literacy skills and concepts. The lesson plan described how learners share their thoughts about a text with teachers and peers and apply comprehension and vocabulary skills. However, learners applied these Reflective Learning Behaviors less than the Explicit Learning Behaviors. In the second and third grade lesson plans, learners were rereading, practicing, reviewing, repeating, identifying, and responding to questions while using reflective practices, such as discussing self-correcting, to reading and comprehending texts, and asking higher-order thinking questions. Even though second and third grade learners applied Reflective Learning Behaviors, the explicit lessons provided limited opportunities to consistently applying these skills across the six areas of literacy.

Teachers described reading behaviors displayed by learners when building comprehension and vocabulary skills with lessons in the curriculum. Learners read texts while learning both

comprehension and vocabulary skills. Learners built vocabulary skills before and after reading texts, too. Teachers shared unexpected learner behaviors that were observed during the literacy block. Learners showed engagement and interest in the topics of exploration within the curriculum units (McGraw-Hill Education, 2016). The observed learner behaviors showed a demonstration of content-specific skills and engagement in content-specific topics, which fall more under Explicit Learning Behaviors and not Reflective Learning Behaviors.

In summary, document analysis indicated that the learner's role in this curriculum was to access and apply literacy skills across the six literacy elements. Although there was an indication of diverse representation in the curriculum, the findings revealed that there was no differentiation in how learners had access to literacy content and skills from lessons and their progression and mastery of knowledge and skills across the literacy elements. Overall, learners applied explicit learning behaviors to progress and master literacy skills taught by teachers in classrooms. Using Schwab's descriptions of learners, *Open Court Reading* provided learners with the opportunity to access and apply literacy-specific skills with peers in their grade level. Yet, the curriculum did not explain the emphasis and focus of individual learning styles outside of English Learners and groups based on progress and mastery of skills. Using a CRLI lens, the curriculum did not describe the inclusion of learners' individual and collaborative feelings about their experiences with learning literacy using the instructional model, lessons, and educational resources included in the curriculum.

This section described the function of the literacy elements, learning context, teacher, and learner from groups of documents. From the perspective of Schwab, each element indicated some of the important characteristics needed for a literacy curriculum that is implemented in elementary schools. There were characteristics of each commonplace that were not described across

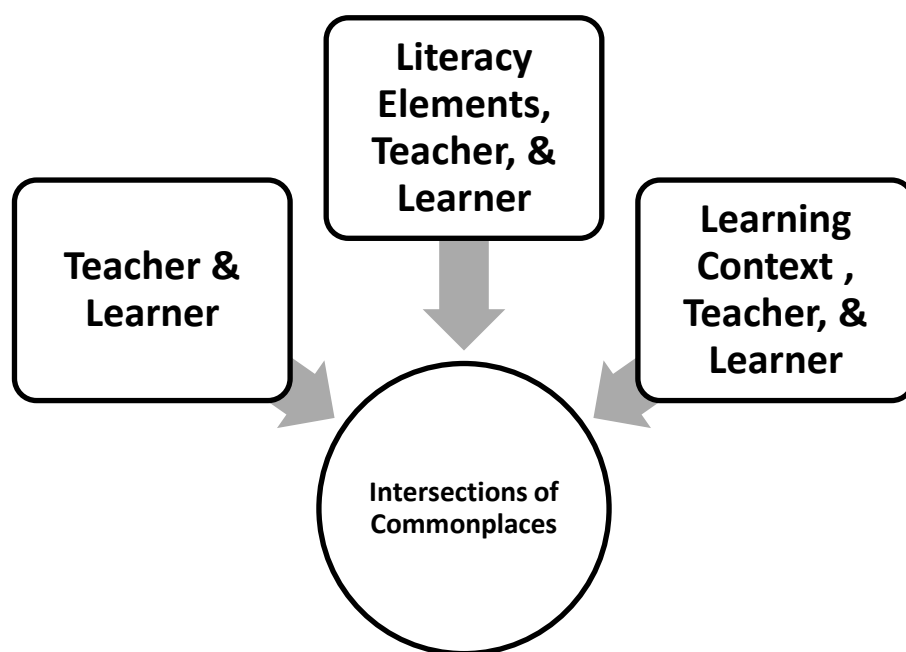
the documents. The descriptions of each commonplace did not reveal if culture and teaching and learning experiences from both teachers and learners were valued in the curriculum, as indicated from a CRLI lens. Yet, with the presence of all four commonplaces, there were unique ways that they related with one another. The next section describes the relationships found between the six literacy elements, the teacher, the learner, and the learning context.

### **The Intersection of Commonplaces**

Analysis of the documents revealed various ways that the literacy elements, teacher, learner, and learning context intersected with one another across the curriculum and in the physical learning space as described in Figure 14. This section describes the types of relationships amongst the four commonplaces that align with the curriculum's mission to prepare lifelong learners of literacy.

**Figure 14**

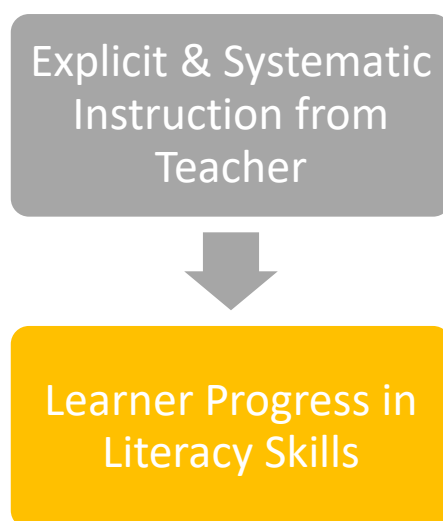
*Types of Intersections Amongst the Four Commonplaces*



**Teacher and learner.** The teacher initiated and guided interactions with and among learners in the classroom. The relationship between the teacher and the learner was described more as a cause-and-effect relationship using explicit and systematic instruction as main instructional model of teaching, as described in Figure 15. The Main Sources were the documents from the publisher's website and the case studies, and the Additional Sources were the lesson plans and the videos. According to the documents on the publisher's website and the teachers in the case studies, learner progression in literacy was a direct result of implementing the scripted lessons according to the layout and design of the curriculum. These documents had a recurring pattern of intersecting the teacher and learners that focused on acquiring skills across the literacy elements. The teachers implemented a systematic, explicit instructional model to support learners with building literacy skills within and across the literacy elements, so they grow into independent and confident readers.

**Figure 15**

*Cause-Effect Relationship between Teacher and Learner*



The process of reading started with teacher instruction that was explicit and systematic, so learners had a strong foundation in the six elements of literacy. Documents on the publisher's

website described the narrative of reading as a difficult task to justify the implementation of an explicit and systematic instructional model to make the process of reading an easier task for both teachers and learners. The description of the purpose and use of the instructional materials, such as the Sound Spelling cards, followed the same teacher-learner relationship, where the teacher gave explicit instruction on identifying letters and sounds to build sound-spelling relationships so learner could recall letter sounds automatically and accurately. This relationship was independent of the teachers and their educational beliefs and perspectives of literacy learning and based on the layout of the curriculum. Although it was not described in this recurring pattern, the learning context consisted of teachers reinforcing literacy skills daily in an explicit and systematic manner with an outcome of automaticity of information recall from learners. The spiraling description of the curriculum followed the same teacher instruction-learner outcome of mastering literacy skills to ensure information recall remained automatic. This pattern created an illusion that teachers had the power of teaching literacy skills to learners, but the designers of the curriculum were the creators of the teacher-learner relationship and decided how and what skills were taught to learners in each grade level. This teacher-learner interaction decreased teacher self-governance and instructional decision-making to support literacy learning for their learners.

Similarly, the Additional Sources described how the teacher-learner relationship was initiated by the teacher. Across the lesson plans, teacher modeling was the main strategy implemented to increase learner recall and application of reading fluency, comprehension, and writing skills. In particular, the comprehension section of the lesson plan explicit provided teacher modeling strategies so learners could listen, observe, and apply those specific skills. The teacher used direct instruction to reteach and remind learners of skill application in the lessons across the literacy elements. The first-grade lesson plan described the teacher giving explicit directions of tasks

to learners, so they applied these specific literacy skills. In the second-grade lesson plan, the teacher modeled literacy skills to show how to apply comprehension skills. The teacher retaught comprehension skills to increase learner progression and application of skills. In addition, the teacher administered informal and summative assessments to monitor learner progress and mastery of literacy skills. The third-grade lesson plan described how teachers used explicit instructional strategies to increase learner application of comprehension and writing skills. Moreover, discussions were led by teachers so students could recall comprehension and vocabulary skills.

The elementary teachers in two videos described the relationship between the teacher and learner as a cause-effect relationship, where the teacher was the initiator of the interaction in the classroom. The teachers described the effect of teaching explicit strategies on learner progress with literacy skills. Each description began with the implementation of explicit teaching of literacy skills with their learners. Teachers observed and monitored learner progress with decoding skills, challenged and pushed learner learning, and boosted learner confidence and learner mastery of literacy skills. One first grade teacher described how the modeling strategy was a teaching strategy that initiated classroom interactions between the teacher and learners. First, the teacher modeled the strategy then the learner modeled and applied the strategy in classroom assignments and tasks. Teacher modeling initiated a cause-effect relationship with learners which led to learner success in applying literacy skills independently in the classroom.

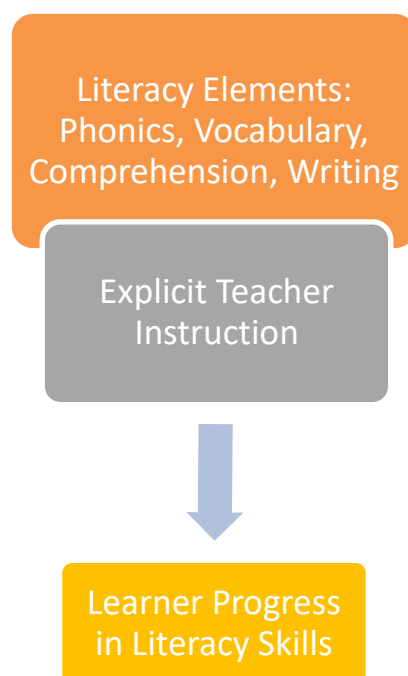
Overall, document analysis revealed a cause-effect relationship between the teacher and learner. The documents described how the teacher initiated the interactions with students most of the time using instructional strategies, such as teacher modeling, their classrooms. The outcomes

of teacher implementation of explicit instruction led to progression and confidence in the application of literacy skills. The next section describes the relationship between the literacy elements, teacher, and learner.

**Literacy elements, teacher, and learner.** The explicit focus of the literacy elements drove interactions between teachers and learners using learning objectives across the six literacy elements. The Main Sources were the documents from the publisher's website and the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) report while the Additional Sources included the case studies, lesson plans and the teachers in the videos. Starting with the Main Sources, the documents from the publisher's website described two relationships: the literacy elements and teacher or the literacy elements, teacher, and learner as described in Figure 16.

**Figure 16**

*Cause-Effect Relationship between Literacy Elements, Teacher, and Learner*



The WWC report described the effectiveness of the curriculum from research findings about teacher instruction and learner outcomes in mastering comprehension and vocabulary



skills. This document explained that implementation of direct instruction lessons led to small improvements in learners' progression and mastery within the comprehension and vocabulary domains. The teacher instruction-learner outcomes relationship focused on high-needs elementary schools that served most learners identified as minority, free and reduced lunch recipients, ESOL, and SPED.

The *Open Court Reading Meets ESSA Criteria* report described the relationship between the literacy elements, instruction, and learner progression and mastery of literacy skills. The authors wrote how explicit and systematic instruction was linked throughout all the literacy elements. Teacher instruction supported learner progression and mastery of literacy skills in the areas of comprehension and vocabulary. The document emphasized the importance of explicit and systematic instruction on learner progression in phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, reading comprehension, and vocabulary. Although the authors described a presence of explicit and systematic instruction in all areas of literacy, the report provided findings to support comprehension and vocabulary only.

Similarly, the Additional Sources described the relationship between literacy elements, teacher, and learner. Across the lesson plans, the relationship between the literacy elements, teacher, and learner began with the literacy objectives within the curriculum. Throughout the Kindergarten lesson plan, the literacy objectives guided the skills that were introduced, retaught, or extended for learners. The lesson sectioned each literacy element of focus so teachers can focus on explicitly teaching specific literacy skills to learners. Both first-grade and second-grade lessons focused on one or two skills for teachers to explicitly teach and reteach so learners can recall and apply those skills independently. In the third-grade lessons, the vocabulary and comprehension objectives were presented by teacher modeling, explicit instruction, and discussions

to build learner automaticity and application of skills. Similarly, the writing objectives were presented through teacher modeling, explicit instruction, and discussions to increase learner application of these skills.

A lower grade elementary teacher described the relationship between the literacy elements and teacher expectations of learner mastery started and reinforced by the literacy objectives in the curriculum. The teacher explained that the phonemic awareness lessons supported her own expectation for learners to master the skill of isolating phonemes in words. The curriculum's inclusion of these phonemic awareness lessons led to teachers' positive views about the alignment between the teacher and the literacy elements taught within the lessons in the curriculum. The teacher did not share if the alignment of teacher expectations with the lessons on phonemic awareness increased learner understanding of these skills and individual and collective success in reading fluency and comprehension in upper elementary grades.

In addition, one teacher in the videos described the relationship between the literacy elements, teacher, and learner as a one-directional relationship starting with the content knowledge as the focus in the lessons. The teacher explained how the lessons exposed learners to various types of Language Arts skills and types of writing. Moreover, the teacher described positive feelings about implementing the lessons that led to learner practice and application of various types of writing in one's classroom.

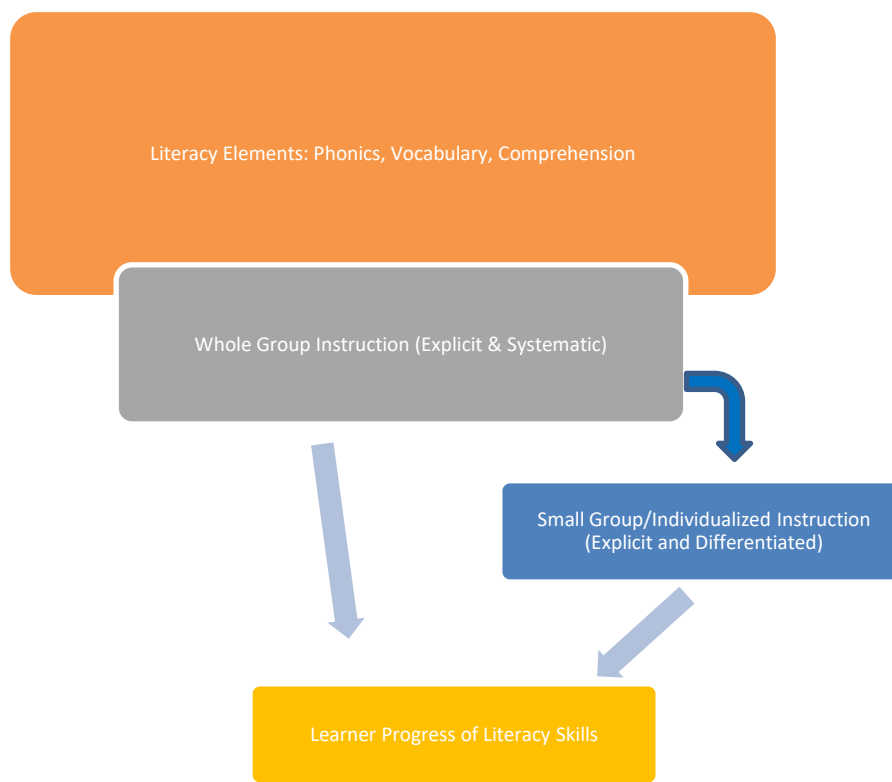
Document analysis revealed a cause-effect relationship between the literacy elements, teacher, and learner. This relationship between these three commonplaces began with the learning objectives across the six areas of literacy. The explicit focus of specific literacy objectives influenced teacher instruction and student progression and application of literacy skills. Another

element influenced the teacher-learner relationship: the learning context. The next section describes the relationship between the learning context, teacher, and learner.

**Learning context, teacher, and learner.** The systematic layout of the literacy block guided interactions with and between teachers and learners. The documents on the publisher's website and the unit introductions were the Main Sources while the Additional Sources were the lesson plans, and the teachers in the videos. The documents described the relationship between the learning context, teacher, and learner as a cause-effect relationship, beginning with the explicit and systematic layout of the lessons. There were three different relationships between the learning context, teacher, and learner: learning context & teacher, learning context & learner, and learning context, teacher, & learner, as described in Figure 17.

**Figure 17**

*Cause-Effect Relationship between the Learning Context, Teacher, and Learner*



The Main Sources described the relationship between the literacy elements, teacher, and learner. The Differentiation document and the unit introductions described the relationship between the learning context, teaching strategies, and groups of learners. During whole group instruction, teachers provided rigorous instruction equally to all learners. Small group or individualized instruction were the teaching spaces where teachers extended or retaught literacy concepts based on learners' needs. Teachers could use curriculum resources, such as the Intervention Teachers Guide and Challenge Novels, to support instruction in smaller learning groups (McGraw-Hill Education, 2020). The unit descriptions of the assessments and progress monitoring described this process as ongoing when identifying areas of growth in learners' literacy learning. However, the Differentiation document did not share any explicit or scheduled time within the lessons, units, or curriculum where assessments are administered in classrooms.

The Additional Sources described the cause-effect relationship between the learning context, teacher, and learner. Teachers in the videos explained that the unit lessons created a teaching and learning routine for both teachers and learners. This routine explained the teacher expectations of teaching the literacy objectives and learner acknowledgement of daily learning expectations. The teachers also described a cause-effect relationship between whole group instruction, teaching strategies of literacy skills, and learner application and success with the literacy skills. One teacher explained that whole group instruction allowed her to model phoneme patterns using the decodable books provided in the curriculum. Modeling literacy skills in whole group led to learners applying decoding skills during independent reading. Another teacher described how whole group instruction using classroom technology allowed for interactive lessons on phoneme patterns with learners. The interactive lessons lead to increased learner success in literacy

throughout the year. In addition, teachers emphasized how assessment administration was organized and implemented based on the literacy objectives in the grade-level units.

Across the lesson plans, the learning context guided teaching instruction and learner progress and application of literacy skills. Each lesson plan showed how whole group instruction was the time for teachers to introduce and review literacy skills to increase learner automaticity and application. Small group instruction was the time for teachers to reteach and extend literacy skills for learner progress and application. In the Kindergarten and first-grade lesson plans, both whole group and small group instructional strategies encouraged teachers to use direct instruction and curriculum materials to introduce, reteach, and extend literacy skills for learner automaticity and application. Moreover, the third-grade lesson plan described partner-sharing was guided by teacher explicit instruction for learners to practice and apply literacy skills with a peer. The lesson plans explicitly described when to give formative and summative assessments to learners. In summary, document analysis showed a cause-effect relationship between the learning context, teacher, and learner. This relationship started with the routines and explicit instructional model included in the layout of the curriculum. The explicit instructional framework guided teacher instruction and learner progression and application of literacy skills.

### **Summary of Findings**

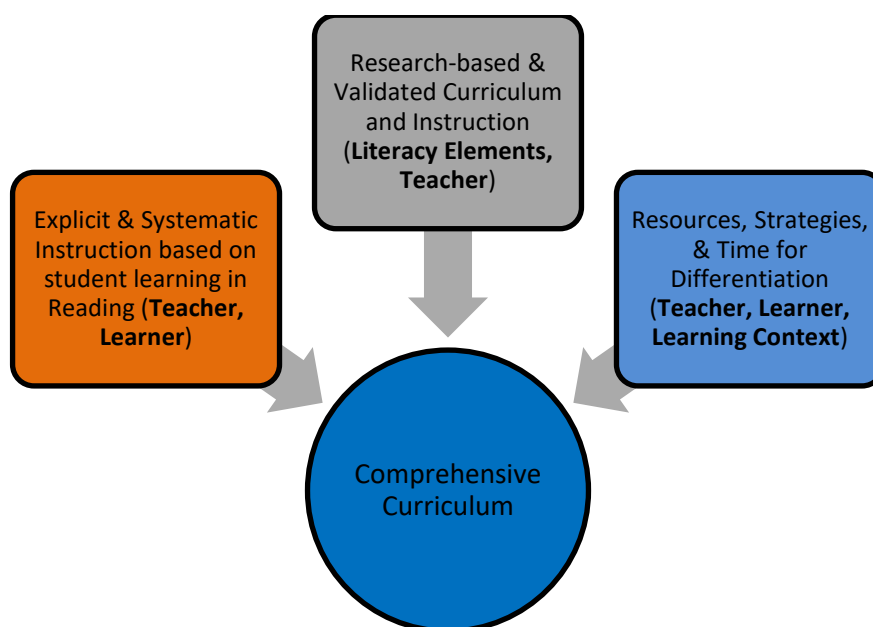
The function of the subject matter was to provide skills in phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing. The function of the learning context was to create a teaching and learning dynamic using whole group and small group practices. The function of the teacher was to implement an explicit and systematic instructional model using Explicit Instructional Practices outlined in the literacy lessons. The function of the

learner was to access and apply literacy skills using explicit learning behaviors taught in the classroom.

The publisher's website described three elements of comprehensive curriculum: explicit and systematic instruction, research-based and validated curriculum and instruction, and differentiation (McGraw-Hill Education, 2020). The four commonplaces were present throughout the three components of a comprehensive curriculum described on the publishers' website. The presence and relationships between the commonplaces were found in descriptions of explicit and systematic instruction, research-based and validated curriculum and instruction, and the implementation of differentiation of resources, strategies, time, as components of the curriculum's effectiveness in teaching literacy to elementary learners to districts and schools.

**Figure 18**

*Model of Comprehensive Curriculum*



*Note.* This model of comprehensive curriculum is based on the descriptions from the publisher's website. The commonplaces are included to show the presence and relationships evident in this curriculum.

Based on the findings of this research study, local, state, and federal leaders can argue that this literacy curriculum is a comprehensive curriculum because it is inclusion of all four commonplaces throughout the program. While this curriculum has representation of all four commonplaces, other literacy curricula may have representation of some of the commonplaces. The findings reveal that the documents support the curriculum's inclusion of the six areas of literacy, the teacher, the learner, and learning context within and across the Kindergarten through third grade literacy lessons. Although the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade units were not included in the corpus of documents, it is assumed that these units have the same representation of the commonplaces throughout the lessons. However, findings reveal an unequal relationship between the four commonplaces throughout the curriculum. The literacy elements (subject matter) and the learning context are valued more than the teacher and learner in this literacy curriculum. Thus, the findings showed that a literacy curriculum with an "evidence-based" label can emphasize the presence of some commonplaces over others. The combination of the focus on the literacy elements and an explicit and systematic instructional model shaped teaching and learning in elementary schools. The curriculum's focus on building literacy skills using explicit and systematic instructional strategies provided a roadmap for teachers to implement the lessons in the order the publishers of the curriculum deemed as valuable in teaching literacy to their learners. The interactions between the literacy elements, teachers, learners, and learning context were based on the explicit and systematic design of the literacy units across lower and upper elementary grades in the curriculum.

The findings revealed that the curriculum did not align with the characteristics of Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction. The curriculum, instructional strategies, and assessment tools in the curriculum did not provide opportunities for teachers to teach and assess learning in

multiple ways that valued voices and experiences. The voices and experiences of learners were predetermined based on scripted questions given by teachers and the topics of exploration and conversation in reading. The findings did not indicate that importance of bringing family and community values in the learning context, as indicates in CRLI.



## 5 DISCUSSION

This research study examined the presence and relationships between the literacy elements, teacher, learner, and learning context in one literacy curriculum. Document analysis revealed the literacy curriculum focused on six areas of literacy, whole group instruction model as the main pathway for teaching and learning, teachers tasked with implementing the instructional model and teaching the six literacy elements, and learners tasked with applying skills taught across the six areas of literacy. The combination of the focus on the six areas of literacy and the explicit and systematic instructional model influenced the interactions between teachers and learners in classrooms. The findings from this research revealed that the curriculum did not provide opportunities for purposeful implementation of strategies within Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction. The curriculum did not describe the incorporation and value of culture, learners' voices and experiences, collaboration, and instructional strategies to support literacy learning for culturally diverse learners.

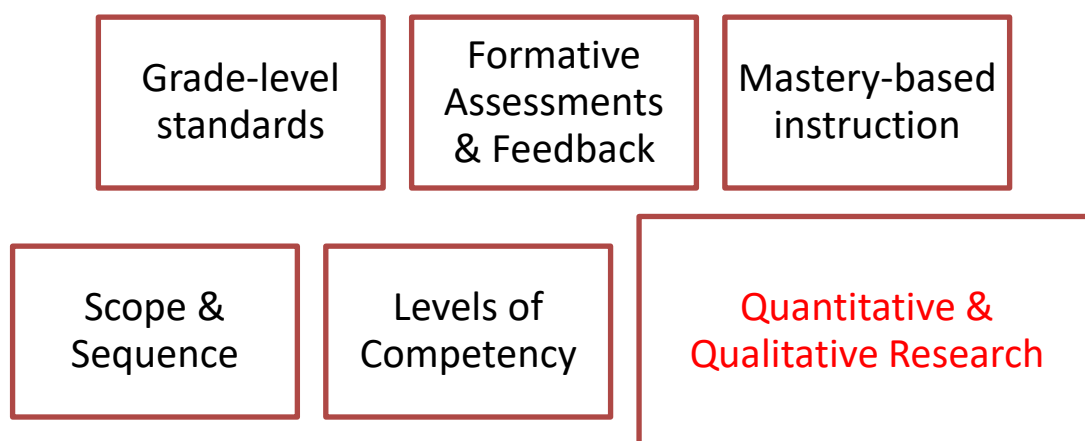
Currently, literacy curricula that is identified as "evidenced-based" by publishing companies, like *Open Court Reading*, are adopted and implemented in high-needs schools to support literacy learning amongst culturally diverse learners. Yet, the adoption of a literacy curriculum that argues it is "evidence-based" affects the possibilities and opportunities to teach and learn in ways that value culture, context, experiences, and literacy learning. This section will describe the issues with literacy curriculum that is described as "evidence-based", the implications of curriculum adoption in high-needs schools, the implications of teacher instructional decision-making, and the argument for the implementation of Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction to support teaching and learning alongside the implementation of a literacy curriculum with an "evidence-based" label in high-needs schools.

### Is the Literacy Curriculum Really “Evidence-based”?

Under the current accountability climate in education, the “Gold Standard” of literacy curricula is for publishing companies to prove that its literacy curricula are supported by quantitative, experimental research (Kavanagh & Fisher-Ari, 2018; Powell, Cantrell, & Correll, 2018; Teale, Whittingham, & Hoffman, 2018). Publishing companies that create and sell literacy curricula use phrases such as “evidence-based” or “scientific” as marketing strategies for educators, school administration, and district leaders to purchase their products using federal funds dedicated for improving literacy teaching and learning in high-needs schools. Additionally, the publishers justify a literacy curriculum’s effectiveness to improving reading achievement by emphasizing “popular” educational words such as “standards” and “mastery-based instruction” (see Figure 19 below) to catch the attention of educators and leaders who are seeking to adopt a literacy curriculum.

**Figure 19**

*Emphasis on Empirical Research out of Evidence-Based Curriculum*



Based on the results of this study, literacy curricula, such as *Open Court Reading*, will use promotional materials that verify that it meets the “Gold Standard” of literacy curriculum by reporting its effectiveness using scientific research; however, the quality and quantity of empirical research may lack the breadth of evidence needed to justify the “evidence-based” stamp of approval. For example, the publishers of *Open Court Reading* use two articles to prove it is supported by empirical research (McGraw-Hill Education, 2020). As reported by the publishers, the researchers describe improvements in reading achievement and comprehension after high-needs schools implemented the literacy program. However, the WWC report only use the research from Borman and associates to justify its effectiveness to improve literacy achievement in high-needs elementary schools. The publishers of *Open Court Reading* use the outcomes of curriculum implementation from the article and the positive rating from WWC to advertise its effectiveness in improving literacy achievement in Kindergarten through sixth grades; even though, the research completed by Borman and associates focused on first through fifth grades. Moreover, the reviewers at WWC eliminate over 50 articles from the corpus of research on *Open Court Reading* because they did not fall under WWC’s qualifications of experimental studies and include one of the four literacy areas: alphabetics, reading fluency, comprehension, and general reading achievement (What Works Clearinghouse, 2012).

It is imperative for district and school leaders to do a thorough investigation on the quality and quantity of research used to justify the effectiveness of literacy curricula that has recommendations by state department of educations, federally funded educational agencies, and publishing companies. Curriculum adoption committee members need to use teacher-researcher behaviors, such as critical thinking and reflection, when determining if a literacy curriculum is “evidence-based” or not (Kacaniku, 2020). Publishing companies may advertise a small and limited

amount of research to convince educators and leaders that their products are research-based and supported by scientific studies to prove its effectiveness in improving literacy achievement at their high-needs schools. Curriculum adoption committees should ask publishing companies to provide more research that considers other variables, such as school context and community involvement, that affect the realities of curriculum adoption and literacy learning in their high-needs schools (Teale, Whittingham, & Hoffman, 2018). Moreover, curriculum committee adoption members should ask questions (see Appendix D) that critically think about the breadth and usage of empirical research to determine a curriculum's effectiveness with literacy teaching and learning. If the publishing company cannot provide studies other than empirical or quasi-empirical studies, it is important for curriculum adoption committees to collaborative with experts of quantitative and qualitative research, including educators, administration, university researchers and professors, that can advise members on a breadth of research needed to determine if a literacy curriculum meets the criteria as “evidence-based” or not.

### **Curriculum Adoption in High-Needs Schools**

ESSA describes four aim of Comprehensive Literacy Instruction: diverse and high-quality print materials reflecting learners' reading levels and interests, a variety of instructional practices, frequent opportunities to practice literacy skills, and the use of a variety of assessments (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The findings from this research study reveal that this literacy curriculum includes all four aims of Comprehensive Literacy Instruction: diverse, high quality texts (e.g., decodable books, literary and informational texts for whole group), diverse a variety of instructional practices (e.g., whole group instruction, small group instruction, teaching modeling, partner-sharing), frequent practice of literacy skills (e.g., spiraling skill practice during

whole group and small group lessons across grade levels) and the application of a variety of assessments (e.g., questioning, formative and summative rubrics).

With this alignment with federal policy, the publishers of the curriculum can argue that this curriculum was created for districts and schools that aim to build lifelong literacy for all learners. However, with the history of low reading scores in urban schools serving culturally diverse children (Chatterji, 2006; Jones, 1984; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Palumbo & Kramer-Vida, 2012; Paschall, Gershoff, & Kuhfeld, 2018), this type of curriculum was created for high-needs elementary schools with goals of improving reading achievement. From a surface level, this type of curriculum includes all four commonplaces across grade-level units that are supported with educational resources available to support teaching and learning. The perceptions across the documents show the curriculum as an inclusive of all four commonplaces; however, there are important dynamics of the four commonplaces that are excluded in the curriculum (Glatthorn, 1999), including opportunities to implement diverse teaching practices and the space to incorporate teacher knowledge within the learning space.

This literacy curriculum, according to ESSA's definition of Comprehensive Literacy Instruction, will be effective in providing explicit, systematic, and intentional instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Although research findings indicate growth in reading comprehension, and vocabulary (What Works Clearinghouse, 2012), the unit lessons introduce skills across all six areas of literacy which are important in literacy progression and mastery in elementary grades. Yet, the primary focus of this type of curriculum is mastering foundational skills, which are phonemic awareness, phonics, and reading fluency, in lower elementary grades. The

focus on foundational skills perpetuates the emphasis of teaching Common Core literacy standards tested in specific grade levels and the presence of a literacy gap observed in high-needs schools who serve culturally diverse learners (Glatthorn, 1999; Teale, Paciga, & Hoffman, 2007). Within our current accountability culture, this type of curriculum seems to align with literacy assessments given in district benchmarks and state standardized tests that become an influential determinant for learner mastery of grade-level standards (Glatthorn, 1999; Goatley & Hinchman, 2013). Thus, schools and districts adopt and implement an evidence-based curriculum that focuses on building mastery of foundational skills for school success (Kirkland, 2014).

The adoption of this type of literacy curriculum molds which literacy skills are taught, what instructional models are employed, and which instructional strategies are implemented by teachers and applied by learners in high-needs schools. Moreover, high-needs schools that adopt and implement this type of curriculum will limit the opportunities for Kindergarten, first, and second grade learners to progress and master skills in reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing. Disparities in literacy growth and mastery amongst culturally diverse learners may continue when the main reason for curriculum adoption is to build foundational skills.

It is imperative for educational leaders to include teachers in discussions about curriculum development and adoption in high-needs schools. Teachers' perceptions across the documents are intentionally included to provide important details about their experiences with implementing the literacy curriculum. Overall, teachers supported the implementation of the curriculum to teach literacy skills to their learners. One first-grade teacher stated:

“It was challenging to suddenly be teaching such a comprehensive program, but it was immediately clear that all of our students needed it.”

These type of honest beliefs about curriculum implementation are important in deciding if a curriculum will align with the mission and vision of literacy learning for learners in schools, especially for learners in high-needs schools. In the same manner that the beliefs of teachers who agree with the adoption of a literacy curriculum, the voices of teachers who resist the adoption of a literacy curriculum should receive the same value and importance in these discussions. With an inclusion of differing perceptions and experiences by teachers, discussions on curriculum adoption can lead to informed decisions for or against the adoption of a specific literacy curriculum with an “evidence-based” label in order to support literacy learning for culturally diverse learners served in high-needs schools. Additionally, the curriculum adoption committee members can pose questions that allow for reflection and critical evaluation of the presence and relationships of the content, the context, the teacher, and the learner (see Appendix D). Educational leaders can listen to teachers’ beliefs about the effectiveness of improving literacy achievement and supporting literacy learning across all six areas of literacy for learners in high-needs schools. These engaging discussions, with the inclusion of teachers’ varying experiences and beliefs about curriculum, lead to “professionalizing” the curriculum adoption process in high-needs schools (Fisher-Ari, Kavanagh, & Martin, 2017, p. 12).

### **Teachers’ Instructional Decision-Making**

Teacher autonomy informs decisions on curriculum choice, instructional strategies, and learning (Johnson & Matthews, 2015; Parker, 2015; Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2013; Torres, 2014). Yet, the findings on the literacy curriculum in this study show explicit and scripted lessons serve as the “one-size-fits-all” guide for teaching while limiting teacher choice in content and instruction (Powell, Cantrell, Correll, 2017). The findings from this research study show a

literacy curriculum with an “evidence-based” label is designed to provide all the necessary lessons, materials, and resources for successful teacher implementation in their classrooms. One first-grade teacher described how the curriculum included has digital lessons, resources, and instructional materials in order to provide instruction that aligns with how learning occurs in today’s schools. Although the curriculum provides the necessary instructional materials and aides for curriculum implementation, teachers are still restricted to implementing the unit lessons to teach literacy skills across all six areas of literacy as designed by the curriculum (Powell, Cantrell, Correll, 2017). The findings reveal how the curriculum’s emphasis on explicit and systematic instruction throughout each lesson constrains teacher creativity and teachable moments (Ainsworth et al., 2012), which negatively influences a teacher’s freedom to make instructional decisions to support literacy learning for their culturally diverse learners (Dresser, 2012).

Explicit and Systematic Instruction creates an oppressive teaching and learning environment for both teachers and learners. The findings from this study reveal that relationships between the learning context, teacher, and learner demonstrate how the explicit and systematic instructional model mainly relies on teachers giving or imparting content knowledge to learners using the systematic layout designed by the creators of the literacy curriculum. The teacher-learner relationship, using the Explicit and Systematic Instructional model, creates a learning dynamic where the teacher assumes the role of the expert and deliverer of content knowledge and the learner is passively receiving content knowledge from teachers (Freire, 2009; Go, 2012), which is a hidden component of instructional implementation in this evidence-based curriculum (Glatthorn, 1999). As a result, the findings in this research study reveal that learners are accessing and applying literacy knowledge and skills in explicit and systematic ways as taught by the teacher. The teacher-learner relationship is a one-directional teaching and learning dynamic. The



intentional emphasis and implementation of Explicit and Systematic Instruction throughout this literacy curriculum limits how teachers make decisions on the instructional needs of their culturally diverse learners across high-needs schools. Ultimately, any growth and mastery observed from learners are attributed to the layout and design of instruction built in the curriculum instead of the teacher's decisions on strategies and instruction based upon content knowledge, teaching experiences, education, and research (Powell, Cantrell, Correll, 2017).

Educational leaders are charged with creating spaces where teachers can build and rationalize their own practice, research, and theory about teaching literacy outside the prescriptive models outlined in this type of literacy curriculum (Fisher-Ari, Kavanagh, & Martin, 2017). There will be teachers who may argue against parts or the entire curriculum because of their engagement in critical research, teaching experiences, or their own pedagogical stance about literacy learning for learners in high-needs schools. Educational leaders need to include teachers in school and district discussions about their experiences and feelings about instructional freedom and judgement when implementing a literacy curriculum with an "evidence-based" label. Freire (2009) writes, "Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the work, with the world, and with each other" (p. 72). With this idea, it is imperative for school, district, state, and federal leaders to create spaces where collaborative, teacher-led learning opportunities are available for continuous discussion and dialogue about literacy curriculum and instructional practices that align with the social, cultural, and academic needs of the culturally diverse learners in their schools.

## **Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction**

Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction (CRLI) allows teachers to empower learners through meaningful literacy experiences that purposefully integrate cultural and social experiences, language, and instruction to meet the academic needs of learners (Adkins, 2012; Callins, 2009; Klingner & Soltero-Gonzalez, 2009; Powell, Cantrell, Correll, 2017). CRLI creates opportunities for collaborative learning in ways that debunk the notion that teachers are the sole experts (Gay, 2010), and values the experiences of learners as co-contributors to their content knowledge in literacy. CRLI practices are necessary to create meaningful learning opportunities for culturally diverse learners that historically devalues the literacies learned in homes and communities. Moreover, the implementation of CRLI allows teachers to create inclusive classrooms with meaningful student-teacher interactions, meaningful peer relationships, and built a classroom community and school culture focusing on safety and respectability (Parhar & Sensoy, 2011). Using the Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction model, this section describes implications on curriculum and instruction implementation, classroom community, the inclusion of students' voices and experiences, assessment and feedback implementation to create learning opportunities for culturally diverse learners in high-needs schools.

**Curriculum.** The curriculum should be meaningful and connect to the lives of learners (Adkins, 2012). The literacy standards and objectives should relate to current events and experiences in the lives of learners. Learners combine reading, writing, and communication skills as tools to express points of view, positions, beliefs, and ideas about historical, social, and cultural events in literature and their own lives. Currently, the findings from this study reveal that evidence-based literacy curricula may not fully represent the diverse cultural backgrounds and stories of learners in high-needs schools. Therefore, the integration of culture and the experiences of

learners can empower them to apply literacy skills to current events, audiences, and solve real-world issues in their communities (Powell, Cantrell, Correll, 2017). The creation and implementation of thematic units will value content, culture, and language (Keehne et al., 2018). Thematic units uphold the importance of literacy skills alongside community revitalization and community service. Additionally, thematic units serve to build culture and identity through the exploration of history, language, and literacy practices and how it relates to current cultural practices in communities.

**Instruction.** Instructional practices should reflect and change based on the needs of learners. If classroom organization and instruction complemented the cultural background and experiences of learners, this improved learning and achievement in literacy (Bui & Fagan, 2013). Powell, Cantrell, and Correll (2017) explain that teachers “must take risks and...make changes to their instructional practices based upon their knowledge of the students and families they serve” (p. 96). Evidence-based literacy curricula guide teachers to implement multiple instructional strategies but emphasizes direct instruction as the main model of teaching. Hence, teachers should balance the implementation of direct instruction, guided instruction, and individual application of literacy skills during learning experiences for learners in high-needs schools (Adkins, 2012). The intentional implementation of instructional strategies, such as read-alouds and role playing, provide learners with opportunities to apply literacy skills (Duggins & Acosta, 2019; Gay, 2010).

Instructional practices should be consistently implemented daily to provide culturally diverse learners with multiple opportunities to apply knowledge and skills in literacy (Duggins & Acosta, 2019). The inconsistency of teacher instructional practices, such as read-alouds, can limit the impact of progress and mastery in literacy. Based on learners’ needs and learning styles,

teachers need to consistently implement different instructional strategies so learners can access content and strategies in multiple ways. Instructional implementation requires teachers to have expertise in the cultural practices and lived experiences with language and literacy instruction with learners in high-needs schools (Keehne et al., 2018).

**Classroom community.** Learning spaces should value safety, high expectations and collaboration for both teachers and learners. Learners thrive in supportive learning spaces where they feel supported by teachers and peers who respect and care for individual and collective progress in applying previous and new knowledge and strategies to literacy (Johnston, 2004; Klingner & Soltero-Gonzalez, 2009). Teachers express high expectations with learners through compassion, encouragement, risk-taking, and commitment to academic success (Adkins, 2012). Currently, the findings from this study reveal that a literacy curriculum with an “evidence-based” label can provide results that show literacy success with learners. Thus, the classroom culture should reflect teachers’ interest and dedication to their learners’ growth and success in literacy. Strategies for building classroom community include build home-school relationships, giving specific praise, and providing opportunities to grapple with challenging material where learners can grow through mistakes.

The learning community should value the social dynamic of learning that uplifts collaboration towards the common goal of academic success (Adkins, 2012). The value of “we” invites both teachers and learners to participate in joint goals and activities to growth in knowledge and application of literacy skills (Johnston, 2004). Learning should involve collaboration between teacher and learners across all six areas of literacy. The inclusion of peer collaboration should value the use of language and cultural practices to reach goals in literacy. Together, teachers and

students can build capacity, confidence, and efficacy amongst one another as they strive to master both cultural and academic literacy skills needed to change their communities.

**Students' voices and experiences.** The voices and experiences of learners should be valued contributions to the classroom community. In following the universal Golden Rule “*treat others as you want to be treated*,” both teachers and learners should respect the ideas and experiences of one another in ways they want to be respected by others, including perceptions about literacy (Adkins, 2012). The findings of this study revealed that the voices and positions of adults, including federal, state, district leaders and even teachers, may or may not reflect the cultural and academic experiences of learners in high-needs schools. Therefore, teachers should encourage learners to express and convey their thoughts on personal and real-world issues using reading, writing, and communicative skills. Teachers can uplift the voices and experiences of their learners through text that relate to the cultural and social experiences of learners, too.

Teachers can supplement literature included in the curriculum with diverse texts to convey beliefs about literacy learning that builds upon content knowledge while valuing diverse beliefs and positions that can align with historical, cultural, and social experiences of learners (Powell, Cantrell, & Correll, 2017). When educational resources provide limited perceptions and experiences, teachers can encourage learners, families, and community members to share their own knowledge and personal experiences about the history, language, and the culture of literacy learning.

**Assessments and feedback.** Assessments and feedback should serve as a learning tools for teachers to understand why and how learners apply literacy skills. Meier and Knoester (2017) explain, “Assessments grow out of the classroom experience” (p. 110). A literacy curriculum with an “evidence-based” label can include a variety of assessments to capture the responses and

application of literacy skills by learners, but these pre-packaged assessments may not align with the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of learners that can display their understanding of literacy knowledge and skills. Thus, both assessments and feedback should be given in multiple formats and languages, including written form, oral form, and in learners' home languages, to meet the needs of culturally diverse learners in high-needs schools. Formative and summative assessments serve to monitor learner progress and clarify any misconceptions about content knowledge and skills (Adkins, 2012). Feedback should use the cultural backgrounds and learning styles of learners to constructively respond to understanding and application of literacy skills. Constructive feedback should involve questions and discussion about reading, writing, and processing of information amongst peers and teachers.

Performance-based assessments can be an approach to grasp the ideas and strengths of learners (Meier & Knoester, 2017). Performance-based assessments serve as an avenue for professionalizing education for teachers and providing an opportunity for the voices and experiences of learners to be heard based on responses to feedback and application of skills. Teachers and learners work together to review and discuss assessment tools and the choices of questions and topics in literacy. Performance-based assessments can give learners ownership of their progression and mastery of literacy knowledge and skill mastery. Portfolios, for example, give learners an opportunity to reveal their cultural and social identities alongside their knowledge and application of literacy skills with peers, teachers, parents, community members, and other stakeholders (Meier & Knoester, 2017). Assessments like portfolios focus on the culmination of experiences and knowledge of literacy and how learners build and challenge themselves to apply literacy skills in real-world contexts.

Schools can adapt the presence of the six areas of literacy, the teacher, the learner, and the learning context within evidence-based curricula in order to incorporate practices using the Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction framework. Teachers and administration can ensure the learning objectives and skills across the six areas of literacy use language that is relevant to the experiences of learners, their families, and the community. The pacing of literacy standards and lessons should build upon and reflect cultural practices and content knowledge of learners within and across grade levels. Content knowledge and application should value both the literacies of learners and the literacies of the academic environment. Schools encourage the development of learning spaces that encourage collaboration, goal setting, and literacy success for both teachers and learners within and across grade-levels. There should be on-going conversations inside and outside the classroom about instructional models and time devoted to teaching and learning literacy. Moreover, schools should consider the implementation of literacy integration across content areas to show the connection and continuum of learning in classroom and real-world contexts. Schools should uplift meaningful teacher practices and strategies that support the needs of learners served in their schools. Instruction should reflect the consideration of the cultural backgrounds and learning styles of learners. Teacher instruction should shift based on individual and collaborative needs expressed by learners in conversation and application of literacy skills. Schools should value the thoughts, beliefs, and experiences of literacy for learners in their schools.

### **Future Research**

This research study began a conversation about literacy curricula with an “evidence-based” label by examining the inclusiveness of six areas of literacy, the teacher, the learner, and the learning context. State, district, and school leaders can use the research study to understand

the implications of curriculum adoption, teacher decision-making, and the argument for the inclusion of Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction in high-needs schools. However, as a researcher, I acknowledged that I wanted to tell the “whole story” about literacy, curriculum, and instruction, but the story exceeded beyond my own knowledge, lived experiences, and this research (Stake, 2003, p. 144). This study did not interview stakeholders about their lived experiences and beliefs about a literacy curriculum. This study only included the stakeholders with decision-making influence in elementary schools, and not the voices of parents and learners. Future research should include the lived experiences and beliefs from parents and learners about the curriculum and reading achievement. Future research should implement a focus group of stakeholders or teachers about their belief and experiences with a literacy curriculum. This study focused on one literacy curriculum and not multiple curricula. Future research should examine the function of the literacy elements, teacher, learner, and learning context across literacy curricula, especially if multiple curricula are implemented in one elementary school.



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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A**

#### **Example of Entry in Researcher's Reflective Journal**

Date May 27<sup>th</sup>

I searched for information about Open Court on What Works Clearinghouse website. The website published a 17-page document describing the research summary, outcome measures, references, and findings. As I read the document, the first question I had was the number of studies that were omitted from the findings because the methodology or sample of participants. 57 out of 58 studies about Open Court Reading were omitted! The WWC review of interventions looked at an effectiveness measure of student outcomes in 4 domains: alphabetics, reading fluency, comprehension, and general literacy achievement. The one study that was chosen went under the comprehension domain. There were no other significant outcomes in the other domains or literacy elements. I was alarmed that the effectiveness measure for Open Court was based upon 1 research study that was quantitative in design. I knew this information was important to read to get more background information about the emphasis of effectiveness in teaching reading skills, as described on the Open Court website. Decisions about curriculum are made by limited research and it affects the dynamics of teaching and learning literacy for students in high-needs elementary schools. I need to look at what measures that the state Department uses to describe curriculum and instruction. Most importantly, I need to get the lived experiences of curriculum implementation an instructional decision making from the teachers.



## **Appendix B**

### **Codes for Schwab's (1973) Four Commonplaces**

1. Subject-matter (SM) is defined as the knowledge that children learn in content area in school. In this study, literacy is the content area of focus. The key terms for subject-matter are the elements of literacy instruction: phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, reading comprehension, fluency, and writing.
2. Teacher (T) is the person that teaches the subject matter to students in classrooms within a high-needs school. In this study, the teacher is person who provides grade-level literacy instruction. Key terms associated with teacher are educator, teacher practice, educational materials, and instructional decisions.
3. Learner (L) is the student that receives grade-level content and curriculum implementation from a teacher. In this study, the learner is the registered student in a classroom of peers of the same age group in a high-needs school. Key terms associated with learner are age group, culture, content knowledge, and learning styles.
4. Milieu (M) is the context where children build and apply knowledge. In this study, the milieu is the classroom dynamics where students apply literacy knowledge. Key terms include classroom dynamics and instructional framework.

## Appendix C

### Example of Analytic Memo for One Data Source

First Round of Analysis

First Grade Lesson Plan

Date: October 8th

Literacy Elements

Phonemic Awareness: Rhyming, phoneme Blending, phoneme segmentation

Phonics: sound-spelling, blending words and sentences, initial sounds, blending words and sentences

Reading fluency: high frequency words, decoding words, comprehension: point to words and answering questions

Comprehension: building background knowledge, retelling story, genre: elements of fables, browsing text- pages numbers and characters, prediction, essential question, purpose of reading, strategy: predictions; discussion- events of story; Comprehension strategies rubric: application of strategy

Vocabulary: words and definitions in story

Other areas: comprehension (genre of story), predicting; Writing: type of narrative writing, story element

Writing: Narrative writing, beginning, middle, and end. Story element: setting;

Assessment: Writing rubrics; penmanship: letter alignment, letter formation on paper, tracing letters formation on letter cards

TEACHER

Teacher tips

Use tape/sticky notes on Sound-Spelling Cards to introduce phonemes

Contrast phonemes at beginning of sounds

Write words and sentence on board

Remind students to use Sound-Spelling cards

Remind student to ask for help

Talk with students about story

Ask student to identify difficult words

Ask questions about story

Tell students to point to words in story

Follow reading routine

Point and read aloud title and page number

Have students to browse first few pages of text

Encourage students to use any reading strategies

Make sure students understand predictions are confirmed or not confirmed

by information in text

Guide discussion about events in text

Remind students to speak loudly and use complete sentences

Prepare materials for writing

Focus on lowercase letters for modeling

#### English Learners Tips

Work in small groups to work on blending phonemes

Ask students to identify and say spelling for phonemes in words

Ask students about events in story

Explain past-tense form of words in text

Remind students on type of writing

Use EL Teacher's Guide's structured writing assignment for students who are not able to complete the main assignment

#### Approaching Level Tips

Give students clues to help generate words

Reteach phonemes to students during Workshop

Review other stories in the same genre if students have difficulty to understand a genre

Ensure students understand the meaning of predictions

Reteach comprehension and vocabulary words during Workshop

Reteach meanings of vocabulary words and have students use words in oral sentences

Work with students on setting in small groups

Show students pictures from familiar stories

#### On Level Tips

Have students reread text to identify uppercase and lowercase letters in text

#### Beyond Level Tips

Allow students to give predictions about end of story

Teacher Modeling (during comprehension) explicit lessons

Home Connections- send letter for comprehension letter so students can discuss text with families and complete the provided activity

### Types of Assessments:

Rubrics, informal, summative, asking questions

### Purpose of Assessments

Informal assessment (rubric): monitor application of comprehension strategy

Summative assessment (rubric): evaluate writing

## LEARNER

Types of learners: English Learner, Approaching Level, On Level, Beyond Level

### Learning Behaviors

Say rhyming words

Listen carefully and watch for signal to blend sounds

Repeat after teacher for phoneme blending

Identify initial and ending sounds in words

Repeat after teacher for initial sounds

Browse text and share thoughts

Retell story

Answer questions in complete sentences (pink writing)

Read names of author and illustrator

Tell story events in order

Give examples of story elements

Draw illustrations of vocabulary words

Tell another episode of story using vocabulary words

Name three parts of a narrative

Use fingers to trace letters on Letter Cards

## LEARNING CONTEXT

Whole Group instruction

Throughout the lesson plan

Small Group Instruction

Workshop- reteaching phonemes and comprehension skills

## Assessment Administration

Informal assessment: rubric after practice with comprehension skill and asking questions throughout lesson

Summative assessment: rubric after revisions of writing

This document is a sample lesson plan in a first-grade unit. This lesson focused on all six literacy elements: phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing. The phonemic awareness lesson focuses on blending and segmenting phonemes in words. Phonics lesson focuses on sound-spelling identification and blending words and sentences. Reading fluency lessons on building high frequency words and word decoding in texts. Reading fluency includes answering questions about words in the text. Reading comprehension and vocabulary were combined in the lessons. Reading comprehension focuses on building multiple skills around one genre. The text is embedded in the lesson plan to review comprehension skills. Vocabulary words and definitions in the text are explicitly taught by teachers. Vocabulary words and definitions surfaced in writing lessons, too. Writing skills focused on writing structure and revisions of one topic in one type of writing. In addition, penmanship skills are reviewed during the writing lesson. The literacy skills for each element are bolded in each lesson in comparison to the small writing of the standards and learning objectives. The lesson plan has a

huge focus on phonemic awareness, phonics, and reading fluency in comparison to comprehension, vocabulary, and writing. The lesson descriptions and strategies are written in paragraphs.

The instructional tips focus on lesson preparation, organization, and instructional strategies to teach literacy skills. Teachers use common office supplies, such as tape or sticky notes outside of the curriculum to support instruction in phonemic awareness skills. However, this reference of office supplies assumes teachers have access to these materials in their classrooms. Most of the tips focus on asking questions and reviewing skills with students during lessons. Teacher Modeling has a huge emphasis in teaching comprehension skills. The modeling strategies are explicitly written in short paragraphs where teachers can read in verbatim from the beginning to the end of the text. Moreover, the lesson provided tips for incorporating discussion of literacy skills at home with students' families. Teachers are encouraged to send a letter, provided by the curriculum, to families to discuss the story genre and complete the assignment. From the lesson plan, the teachers did not encourage students to return the assignment for a grade or review.

This lesson plan provides two types of assessments using the same type of tool: informal and summative assessments with rubrics. Both informal and summative assessments use curriculum-created rubrics to monitor and evaluate student learning, respectively.

This lesson plan focused on four types of learners: English Learners, Approaching Level, On Level, and Beyond Level. These groups of students are identified in the lesson plan based on their progress and mastery of literacy skills. Like the Kindergarten lesson plan, there were more strategies for English Learners and Approaching Level students in comparison of On Level and Beyond Level learners. The On Level and Beyond Levels learners each had one task to complete throughout the entire lesson. English Learners and Approaching learners are working in whole

group and small group settings on literacy skills that they are growing to master. Learners mostly used explicit learning behaviors to access literacy content. Learners used four of the five senses to demonstrate understanding of literacy skills. Learners were listening, watching, speaking, and illustrating their responses; however, the learners were explicitly instructed to activate their senses at different sections of the lesson plan. Learners were repeating, retelling, giving, and naming literacy skills and concepts. The lesson plan described how learners share their thoughts about a text with teachers and peers and apply comprehension and vocabulary skills. However, learners accessed these reflective learning practices less than the explicit learning behaviors.

Overall, the lesson plan describes two types of instruction: whole group instruction and small group instruction. Throughout the lesson plan, whole group instruction was applied throughout all the literacy lessons. During Workshop, the lesson plan applies small group instruction to reteach phonemic awareness and comprehension skills. The lesson plan describes when to administer both informal and summative assessments. The Comprehension strategy rubric and questions about decoding, comprehension skills, and vocabulary are given throughout the lesson to check for understanding. The Writing rubric is used to evaluate students' complete writing piece. The lesson plan explicitly details the name and timing to administer these assessments.

## Second Round of Analysis

Date: October 10th

### INTERSECTIONS

#### Teacher & Learner

Teacher models phonemic awareness and comprehension skills to increase student progress



Teacher explicit directions of comprehension skills to increase student application

Teacher reteaches and reminds students to apply literacy skills across the literacy elements.

#### Literacy Elements, Teacher, Learner

The literacy elements of focus guide what skills are introduced, retaught, and extended for student automaticity and application.

#### Learning Context, Teacher, Learner

Whole group instruction—explicit teaching---student application of literacy skills

Small group instruction---explicit teaching---student progress and application of literacy skills

This lesson plan describes the relationship between the commonplaces. Throughout the lesson plan, the relationship between the teacher and learners are initiated by the teacher.

Teacher modeling is applied to increase student automaticity and application of phonemic awareness and comprehension skills. The lesson plan describes that teachers give explicit directions of tasks to students, so they apply specific literacy skills. Teachers use direct instruction to reteach and remind students of skill application in the lessons across the literacy elements.

The relationship between the literacy elements, teacher, and learner focuses on the literacy skills that teachers teach to their students. The lessons for across the literacy elements focus on one or two skills for teachers to explicitly teach so students can recall and apply skills.

The relationship between the learning context, teacher, and learner began with whole group and small group instructional models. The lesson plan shows how whole group instruction

was the time to introduce and review literacy skills for student automaticity and application of skills. Small group instruction was the time to for teachers to reteach and extend literacy skills for student progress and application.

## Appendix D

### Curriculum Adoption Questionnaire

Use these questions to guide your discussion and decision-making process for curriculum adoption and implementation in your school.

"Evidenced-based" Label

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What types of research studies are used to prove the "evidence-based" label for a literacy curriculum?

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How many research studies are provided to support the "evidence-based label? Who provided the research?

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Does the research studies use qualitative methods, such as observations, interviews, etc.?

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*Components of Curriculum*

	<p>Are all six areas of literacy targeted in the curriculum? If not which areas are not present?</p>
Content Area	<p>Are learning objectives clearly defined to determine content mastery? If not, what indicators are outlined for content mastery? Learning targets? Others?</p> <p>Are there opportunities to include literacies, which can include digital literacy, that are valued within the cultural experiences of your learners?</p>
	<p>Which instructional model is emphasized in the curriculum?</p>
Learning Context	<p>In what types of instruction are emphasized during the literacy block? Whole-group Instruction? Small Group Instruction? Others?</p> <p>Are there opportunities to extend literacy teaching and learning to communities and real-world contexts?</p>

Teacher

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What instructional practices are emphasized in order to teach literacy?

Differentiation?

Modeling?

Others?

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What types of formative and summative assessments are implemented to gather student data on content mastery?

Are there other assessment tools left out of the curriculum?

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Are there opportunities to implement instructional practices that value culture and literacy for your learners?

Collaborative learning

Discussions

Others?

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Are all learners represented in the curriculum?

If not, which group of learners is targeted in the curriculum? Which groups are not?

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Learner

What behaviors or actions are emphasized to determine learners' mastery of literacy content knowledge?

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How are learners' cultural backgrounds and experiences included and valued during literacy learning?

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